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## The Sabbath, the Sign of the Covenant

### 31:12-18 and 35:1-3

The Sabbath, the sign of the covenant DIG: Before setting before the Israelites all the work that they had to do in building the Tabernacle, why did God remind them about the Sabbath? If the project was the top priority, why not work overtime? Verse 18 finishes what God had to say to Moses on Mount Sinai. What is the beginning point for these covenant terms?

REFLECT: How do you view the Sabbath rest? A necessity or a luxury? When you relax, do you feel guilty? Why or why not? What duties crowd out your Sabbath rest? Would you say the Sabbath is as much a focus in your life as it was for the Israelites? Why or why not? What day of the week is your Sabbath rest?

**Parashah 22: Vayak'hel (He assembled) 35:1-38:20**  
(In regular years read with Parashah 23, in leap years read separately)  
(see my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah)

**The Key People** are **Moses**, all the congregation, **Bezalel**, **Oholiab**, and other gifted artisans.

**The Scene** is the wilderness.

**The Main Events** include **Moshe** telling the words **God** had commanded - to keep **Shabbat**, take offerings, make a dwelling; offerings were brought, **Bezalel** and **Oholiab** were filled with the **Ruach Ha'Kodesh**; the offerings were stopped when enough was collected; artisans made curtains, bars, veils, the ark, poles, cherubim, table, rings, poles, lampstand, lamps, altar of incense, a bronze altar with horns, utensils, poles, a bronze basin, court court, linen hangings, pillars, sockets and the gate.

Notice that the description of the **Tabernacle** and its furnishings in **25:1** to **27:21** is large part repeated here in **35:1** to **38:20**, sometimes word-for-word. Therefore, to make things less confusing for the reader, I have combined them into one account. But why the duplication? For one thing, **ADONAI** was showing that **His** purposes would not be thwarted,

even if man's sin (see [Gg - The Golden Calf Incident](#)) causes a delay in **His** perfect will. A second reason has to do with the fundamental importance of **the Tabernacle** and **the blood** atonement rituals that allows for communion with **YHVH**. It seems to me that **God** was trying to tell **the Israelites** that the way to come before **Him** was through **the blood** of a sacrificial victim, and this would ultimately be fulfilled in **the Person of the Messiah Himself**.

Every family needs special time together. **ADONAI** provided for just such times in giving a whole cycle of Holy Days in **Leviticus** (see the commentary on **Leviticus**, [to see link click Eb - God's Appointed Times](#)). These are observed once a year; but at the head of the list is **Shabbat**, which is to be kept one time each week. It is on **Shabbat** that **the Bride (Isra'el)** and **Groom (God)** meet in a special way with each other.



**The Sabbath**, or **Shabbat**, would become the sign of **God's** covenant with **Moses**, just as the rainbow was the sign of **God's** covenant with **Noah (Genesis 9:12-17)**, and circumcision the sign of **God's** covenant with **Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14)**. Before beginning to work on the Tabernacle and its furnishings, **ADONAI** reminded the people that they were not to work **on the Sabbath** in order to get it completed sooner. The continued building of the place of worship **on the** day of worship would be a great sin.<sup>477</sup>

**Moses assembled the whole of the Israelite community.** Our faith requires reason. When **the Israelites** left Egypt there were 600, 000 men between the ages of 20 and 50. So, without a PA system available, and presuming that most of the men only would be gathered to hear Moses speak, that size crowd would have had difficulty hearing and understanding the voice of **Moses**, especially if he had not been healed from his stuttering. So, what does it mean, **Moses assembled the whold of the Israelite community**? The probability is that representatives of the tribes and the families were gathered – representing every group and division of **the people of Isra'el**. This is why it says that those who were gathered were **the whold of the Israelite community**. This leaves an opening to a logical question regarding

the situation and gathering that represented **all of Isra'el**. Why is this important? Because we have the text in **Romans 11:26**, where **Paul** states, **And so all of Isra'el will be saved**.

**And He** said to them, this is what **ADONAI** commands: **You must observe My Sabbaths** every week. Which implies that the Jews of yesteryear and the Messianic Jews and Gentiles today are to make a special effort to do it. **This will be a sign between Me and you for the generations to come**. The purpose of **the Sabbath** is **so you may know that I am ADONAI, who makes you holy (31:12-13, 35:1-2)**. It is, in other words, a reminder of who **God** is and what His intentions are for **His** people. **Despite the desire of God to build the Tabernacle, the work should not override the sanctity of the Sabbath**. We also see here what Jesus meant when He said: **The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27)**. The regular keeping of **the Sabbath** helps us to understand **God** better and love **Him** more.<sup>478</sup>

**Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you**. For six days they were to work, but on the seventh day they were to rest. This was not to be violated, even for something as holy as building **the Tabernacle**. It was a test of the nations commitment to **God**. **Anyone who desecrates it was to be put to death**.

The seventh day is an armistice in man's cruel struggle for existence, a truce of all conflicts, personal or social, peace between man and man, man and nature, and peace within man. It is an exodus from tension, a liberation of man from the muddiness of this life. In the stormy ocean of time and toil there are islands of stillness where we may enter a harbor and reclaim our dignity. The island is the seventh day. **The Sabbath**, then, is more than an armistice, more than an interlude; it is a profound conscious harmony of man and the world. It unites what is below with what is above. On that day all the world is brought into union with **God**.<sup>479</sup> Therefore, **whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his or her people (31:14)**, which would result in **death**.

They were to keep **the Sabbath** even when building **the Tabernacle**. Because the nation was in a covenant relationship with **Him**, the people were to do as **He** had done. **For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh is a Sabbath of rest, holy to ADONAI**. **Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. Do not light a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day (31:15, 35:3)**. **Moses** reaffirmed **God's** insistence that no work was to be done **on the Sabbath** – not even the lighting of **a fire**. If a man was caught gathering sticks **on the Sabbath Day**, he was stoned to death in **Isra'el**. To this day, orthodox Jewish communities retain the services of Gentiles to light cooking or

heating fires for them **on the Sabbath**.<sup>480</sup> These passages were obviously meant to warn **the Israelites** not to work on **the Sabbath**. They were to celebrate **the Sabbath for the generations to come as a lasting covenant (31:16)**. To **God**, breaking **the Sabbath** was the same as breaking the **covenant**.

**The wedding ring:** The wedding ring serves to remind the couple that they are in a covenant, committed to each other. It is the same with **Shabbat**. Honoring **the Sabbath** helps to remind **the Jewish people** that **they** are **God's** and **He** is **theirs**. **It will be a sign between Me and the Israelites forever, for in six days ADONAI made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested (31:17)**. **Sabbath** rest is anchored not just in the written word, but also in the creation itself, because **God** rested **on the seventh day**.<sup>481</sup> When **Jews** practice **Shabbat**, others can see and know that **they** belong to **the LORD** just as when one sees a ring, they know that person is "taken." Thus, as **a sign**, **Shabbat** also helps to guard the bride form intrusion of suitors who would come in a try to destroy the marriage. It is especially a message to other nations **to know that I am ADONAI who sets you apart to be holy (Leviticus 20:8b)**.<sup>482</sup>

**Moses** had entered the Sh'khinah glory **on Mount Sinai** and had stayed there for forty days and forty nights. Now at the end of that time, what **God** spoke was then etched in **stone**. He then gave **Moses the tablets of stone** containing **the Ten Commandments** that **He** had promised in **24:12**. Probably all **Ten Commandments** were written on each tablet, which was the common way suzerain treaties were written at that time. One was made for the suzerain and the other for the vassal. **When ADONAI finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai**, His instructions regarding the Tabernacle and its priestly ministries were complete. **The tablets of stone** and the writing on **them** came from **the finger of God (31:18)**, that is, **He** is the author and the source of **them**. That exact phrase is found earlier in **8:19** where **the magicians** of Egypt recognized that the plague of gnats came from the power **of God**.

To put it another way, **the Tabernacle** was a holy space; **the Sabbath**, by comparison, was a holy time. By building **the Tabernacle** and setting apart one day in seven, **God** was truly recreating heaven in space and time. Weekly **Sabbath** worship was **holy** time on **holy** ground. There was no more **holy** spot on the face of the earth than **the Tabernacle on the Sabbath**. We can clearly see how important **the Tabernacle**, and later the Temple, was to **Isra'el's** identify as **God's** people. By entering **the Tabernacle**, **Isra'el** entered **ADONAI's** house; by keeping **the Sabbath**, **Isra'el** entered **God's** rest.<sup>483</sup>

Of all the commandments in the Torah, none is dealt with more frequently in the TaNaKh

than resting **on the Sabbath**. That fact underscores its great importance to **the Jewish people**. And it should be no less important today than it was in biblical times.<sup>484</sup> It is part of the blueprint for living.