

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXII: Vayakhel (Ex. 35:1–38:20)

Essay 3. You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the Sabbath

פסוק "לא־תבערו אש" וכו'. פסק הרמב"ם ז"ל (בפרק ב' מהלכות שבת) וז"ל, המהלך במדבר ולא ידע מתי הוא יום שבת, מונה מיום שטענה ששה ומקדש שביעי, ובכל יום נאפילו ביום זה שמקדש ומבדיל בו מותר לו לעשות קדי פרנסתו בלבד, קדי שלא ימות, עכ"ל. וזהו "לא־תבערו אש בכל משבתיכם ביום השבת", קלומר "בכל משבתיכם" אי אתה מבעיר ביום השבת, דהיינו כשאתה מבעיר ביישוב, אכל אם תהנה במדבר, אז תצטרך להבעיר אף בשבת לעשות פרנסתך.

There is a verse: **“You shall kindle no fire** throughout your settlements on the Sabbath day” (Ex. 35:3). The Gemara, at both Shabbat 20a and Yevamot 6b, discuss the implication of the verse. The laws of the Sabbath apply to an individual, both within and without the Land of Israel, so of what significance is the word “settlements”? **The Rambam, of blessed memory, ruled (in the second chapter of the laws of the Sabbath, 22nd halacha), and these are his words:**

One who is journeying in the wilderness and he doesn't know when the Sabbath day is, he counts six [days] from the day that he erred [in keeping track of the days] and sanctifies the seventh [day] and recites the blessings of the day, and makes *havdalah* at the conclusion of the Sabbath [according to that count]. And on each and every day—even on the day that he sanctifies and [after nightfall] makes *Havdalah*—he is permitted to do only [work required] for his sustenance, in order that he not die. But it is forbidden for him to do more that [what is required] for his sustenance, as there is a doubt about each and every day that it is the Sabbath.

- Mishnah Torah, Sabbath 2:22

This is the meaning of, “You shall kindle no fire throughout your settlements on the Sabbath day.” It is as if to say, “In all your settlements, you may not kindle fire on the Sabbath day, which means “when you kindle fire while in a settlement.” That is, if one is in a settlement, there will be others there who will know when the Sabbath is, and therefore one will

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be able to attend to his Sabbath needs ahead of the onset of the Sabbath. **But if you will be in the wilderness, then you will need to kindle fire on the Sabbath to provide your sustenance** so that you won't die. That is, as the Rambam explained (but as wasn't quoted by the Zera Shimshon), one in the wilderness who is not sure of the day can do work on the day that he considers the Sabbath, but only enough to fulfill his needs for that day. He can't prepare the day before for his Sabbath's needs, as he would were he in civilization or were he sure what day is the Sabbath, because the day that he considers to be Friday could actually be the Sabbath, and then he would be performing work on the actual Sabbath in making preparations for the next day, which is not permitted.

ואפשר שלזה רמז הכתוב באמרו "ששבת ימים תעבד ועשית כל-מלאכתך ויום השביעי" וכו'. כל זמן שבששבת ימים תוכל לעשות כל מלאכתך, דהיינו כשאתה יודע אימתי שבת, שאז בחול תוכל לעשות כל מה שתראה, אז "יום השביעי שבת... לא-תעשה כל-מלאכה". אבל כשאתה במדבר ולא תוכל לעשות בששבת ימים "כל-מלאכתך", רק כדי פרנסתך, אז אף ביום השביעי לא תוכל לשמר "לא-תעשה כל-מלאכה", מפני שאף באותו היום תצטרך לעשות כדי פרנסתך.

It is possible that Scripture hints at this by saying, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the L-rd your G-d: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements” (Ex. 20:9-10). As long as within the six days you will be able to do all work, that is, that you know when the Sabbath is, such that on the [other days] you will be able to do all that you wish, then “the seventh day is a Sabbath . . . you shall not do any work.” But when you are in the wilderness, and in six days you aren't able to do all of your work even for your sustenance, then even on the seventh day you won't be able to obey the command “you shall not do any work,” because on that same day you will need to act because of your sustenance.

ועל זה אמר הכתוב "קדשי בזית ואת-שבתתי חללת", דאמרינו בריש מסכת יבמות יכול יהא בגנו בית המקדש דוחה שבת? תלמוד לומר "את-שבתתי תשמרו ומקדשי תיראו" וכו'. וזהו "קדשי בזית", כלומר שאינם חשובים לפי שאין דוחין את השבת, ואחר כך אף "את-שבתתי חללת" הם תרמי דסתרו אהדדי.

Regarding this,¹ Scripture says, “You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths” (Ezek. 22:8). As it says in the beginning of tractate Yevamot:

¹ It is unclear to the translator what the connection is to the preceding text and this paragraph. The Scripture discussed initially, Ex. 35:3, appears in Yevamot 6b, close to the discussion that follows. But in Yevamot 6b, the verse is used to discuss whether a court-opposed death penalty is conducted on the Sabbath, and this doesn't seem related to the violation of the Sabbath for which Ezekiel condemned the people.

As it is taught in a *Baraita*: **Perhaps the building of the Temple should override the Sabbath?** [To rule that out,] **the verse states: “You shall keep My Sabbaths and revere My Sanctuary, I am the L-rd”** (Lev. 19:30), [which means that] all of you are obligated in My honor. [G-d is honored when the Sabbath is observed, and He demands the observance of the Sabbath even when the Temple is being built.]

-Yevamot 6a

This is the meaning of **“you have despised My holy things,”** as if to say that they are **not important** in your eyes **because they do not override the Sabbath, but afterward “you profaned My Sabbaths”**—**these two contradict each other.** That is, first you thought that perhaps the building of the Tabernacle and the Temple² should override the Sabbath. When you learned that wasn't the case, you despised the Tabernacle and the Temple, because you felt that they were not as important as the Sabbath. Then, after that, you also decided to desecrate the Sabbath. This is contradictory behavior, for you should have recognized that the Temple was holy and that not building it on Sabbath served to point out how important the Sabbath is, so you should have kept the Sabbath and not profaned it!

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² Or perhaps “My holy things” refers to the Temple and the Temple vessels.