

## NATIONAL GOALS IN CONTEXT

### A Devotional Meditation on Tetzaveh (You Shall Command)

Exodus 27:20-30:10; Ezekiel 43:10-27;  
Proverbs 29:18; Hosea 4:6; 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

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Thanks to my Uncle Charles, our family became involved in the American space program long before 1962, when President Kennedy established the national goal of putting a man on the Moon before the end of the decade. Charles had learned many skills as a machinist in the Navy. Those skills earned him a position at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, where Dr. Wernher von Braun was directing the development of space launch vehicles.

My uncle built models for use in the wind tunnels where experimental designs were tested. When the need arose to attach spherical shapes onto the models as part of the experiments, Charles developed a special welding technique that solved the problem. That got the attention not only of the engineering team, but Dr. von Braun himself. As my cousin Richard told us, von Braun would go directly to Charles when he had a special project that required his skills. We're not sure, but it is possible that the models pictured with Dr. von Braun in his office are among those that Charles crafted.



Dr. Wernher von Braun in his office with rocket models behind him, September 16, 1960. NASA photo M60-236 uploaded by the NASA Remix Project, September 22, 2009, [via Flickr](#).



My Uncle Charles Wood at a ceremony honoring him and his supervisor for their work on the Space Program at Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, Alabama, c.1965. Left to right: Astronaut Scott Carpenter, Supervisor (name unknown), Charles Wood, Dr. Wernher von Braun. Photo used by permission of Richard Wood.

Uncle Charles inspired us all even though he never boasted about his accomplishments. He contributed his part in that wondrous time when the Moon missions provided focus and hope to our nation. America faced great challenges in the trials of the Vietnam War and the transition of the Civil Rights Era, but the space program gave us proof that our nation was still capable of great things and could produce great heroes. We knew the names of astronauts Alan Shepherd, Scott Carpenter, John Glenn, Neil Armstrong, and Buzz Aldrin. They were the stars of our space program, but they could never have done what they did without the skilled craftsmen, engineers, mathematicians, administrators, and scientists who simply did their jobs because

that's what they were supposed to do. People like my Uncle Charles – ordinary people who did extraordinary things.

A national goal like reaching the Moon will do that to people. Such a goal inspires them to reach for something they never thought possible. That's another remarkable aspect of humanity that we learn from our Creator. We see it in the construction of the Tabernacle. When God wanted a place to dwell among His Covenant people of Israel, He gave them the national goal of building such a structure and putting it into operation. The stars were the priests who presented Israel's offerings to God. They could not have done any of that without the Levites to carry out the supporting tasks. Without the entire nation behind them, though, the priests and Levites would have had no Tabernacle. We understand that from passages like this:

Bring your brother Aaron near with his sons from among *Bnei-Yisrael* [Children of Israel], so that they may minister to Me as *kohanim* [priests]—Aaron and his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. You are to make holy garments for your brother Aaron, for splendor and for beauty. You are to speak to all who are skilled, whom I have filled with a spirit of artistry, to make Aaron's garments for consecrating him, so that he may minister to Me as a *kohen*. These are the garments that they are to make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a tunic of checkered work, a turban and a sash. They are to make holy garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so that he may minister to Me as a *kohen*.”

Exodus 28:1-4 TLV

God made a point of mentioning the people He had equipped to create all the components of the Tabernacle, from the priests' garments to the holy incense, and all the utensils, vessels, and tools. We don't know their names, and we know only a few names of the priests and Levites, but God knows all of them. He knows all their stories, their hopes and dreams, their flaws and failures, and all the dreams He had of them from before the foundation of the world.

Human beings haven't changed much in 3,000 years. That's why it's reasonable to suppose that some, or perhaps most, of the people God filled with a spirit of artistry chose not to lend their skills to the national project He had inaugurated. They still benefitted from the holy work of the priests and Levites, enjoying the protection, blessing, and direction God gave His Covenant nation. Their focus was probably not on any of that, though. They probably had more concern about getting through each day with as little trouble as possible. Not having a vision for the holy calling of their people, they would have carried on daily routines that would have become tedious, as always happens when people have no vision. That's why they perish – not because they are doing anything inherently evil, but because they have made themselves incapable of reaching for the holy greatness our Creator put into each of us.

National goals help pull us out of the tyranny of the mundane. They give us hope and vision. Even so, they do not last long. China's Great Wall was a national goal, as was Spain's conquest of the New World, and our race to the Moon. In time, even the greatest of national goals are forgotten, and the achievements crumble to dust. That doesn't diminish their importance to our collective story, but it does put them in perspective.

Nations come to an end, but God's Kingdom endures forever. That's why He still calls us to contribute what He has put in us to build His Kingdom. Paul tells us how that works:

Now there are various kinds of gifts, but the same *Ruach* [Spirit]. There are various kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are various kinds of working, but the same God who works all things in all people. But to each person is given the manifestation of the *Ruach* for the benefit of all. For to one is given through the *Ruach* a word of wisdom, to another a word of knowledge according to the same *Ruach*, to another faith by the same *Ruach*, to another gifts of healings by the one *Ruach*, to another workings of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same *Ruach* activates all these things, distributing to each person individually as He wills.

For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of the body—though many—are one body, so also is Messiah. For in one *Ruach* we were all immersed into one body—whether Jewish or Greek, slave or free—and all were made to drink of one *Ruach*.

1 Corinthians 12:4-13 TLV

This is our God's vision for us all. He will have His way, restoring His creation to what He intended from the beginning. It's the national goal He has established for the people of His Covenant – which means everyone who answers His invitation. The choice before us is to play our part, however great or small, or let the vision pass us by.