

Parashah Sixty-Three

Exodus 25:1–26:30; Isaiah 66:1–13; 1Corinthians 6:12–20

notes by Tim Hegg

God Among His People

The phenomenal scene of chapter 24, with Moses and company ascending Mt. Sinai, is really beyond comprehension. Even more difficult to grasp is what must have been the awesome and in many ways terrible feelings Moses encountered as he left the rest and headed into the cloud, there to converse with God. Perhaps no other chapter in the Torah captures the essence of worship as this one does—man and God, conversing together in the realm of His infinite holiness.

Equally remarkable and important is the manner in which the text continues. Our *parashah*, following immediately upon the heels of the mountain experience, begins to describe in detail the *מִשְׁכָּן*, (*Mishkan*), its precise layout, and the articles of furniture that were to be built for it. The message is an obvious one: God intends to dwell with His people, giving to them the same kind of communion that Moses enjoyed on the mountain. God in all of His glory would dwell among the people of Israel.

Here we find a truly remarkable revelation about God: He will descend to dwell with His people. It is not that He would somehow give each and every one of His children the experience of climbing the mountain as Moses and the others had done, but that He would Himself descend from the mountain and reveal His presence among the people in the very place where they were dwelling. Here we find the progressive revelation of the incarnational reality: God dwelling with mankind.

But we find another important truth in the arrangement of these *parashot*—God’s dwelling among His people could not in any way diminish His holiness. If He were to dwell among His people, then there would be required a separation between His holiness and the unholy character of the people. Thus, the *Mishkan* represents not only the locus of His revealed presence, but also the boundaries dividing between the holy and the profane.

And thus the purity laws became a necessary reality. No one unclean may enter the region of the *Mishkan*, and only those specifically sanctified (set apart) for the holy work of intercession could enter the *Mishkan* proper, and only one, the *כֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל* (high priest), could enter the Most Holy Place, the very place where the *שְׁכִינָה* (*Shekinah*), the glorious presence of God, was manifested. The *Mishkan* is Mt. Sinai at the people’s level, a Mt. Sinai that would move with them!

Thus, the entire sacrificial system, the priestly activities, the elaborate laws of purities, the structure of the *Mishkan* itself—all of this was given for one purpose—that God and man might have friendship and communion—that the Creator and His creatures might converse together and enjoy each other’s company. The ultimate purpose of the *Mishkan*, then, was to be a foreshadowed of Yeshua, the Incarnate One Himself, Who would dwell among mankind as Immanuel, “God with us.”

The first request in the process of building the *Mishkan* was for the people to gather the necessary materials to complete the construction: *וַיִּקְחוּ-לִי תְרוּמָה*, “and they shall take for Me a portion.” We see that the word translated “portion” is *terumah*, a word built upon the root *רום*, “to lift up,” “make high” and often translated “contribution.” Note that this was not a requirement but is stated to be *מֵאֵת כָּל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לָבוֹ*, “from each one whose heart moves him.” The word translated “moves” is *נָדַב*, “to urge on” (*qal*) and “to volunteer” (*hitp.*). (It is interesting

that this verb contains the exact letters of Aaron's son's name, Nadav, who would later be slain in the very *Mishkan* which was built by *volunteer* contributions!) Contrary to those who attempt to explain the ancient experience of God's people as primarily *external*, we see once again that the Torah teaches us about the *inward* reality of a spiritual dimension. The giving of these materials was specifically to be by the "moving of one's heart"—responding to the gracious call of God and His desire to dwell among the people. In short, we have here every indication that God's dwelling among His people necessitated their preparing a place for Him in advance of His coming. Their "redemption" had already taken place—a singular, powerful work of God without any request or need for their help. But the purpose of the exodus was not only to rescue them from the evils of Egypt—it was also so that they might worship HaShem. The *Mishkan*, therefore, is an absolute necessity for the realization of God's purpose in the exodus, and the construction of the *Mishkan* is a joint effort between God and Israel.

This emphasizes a crucial truth about our redemption in Yeshua: we were redeemed *so that we might worship HaShem, and this worship requires that we, together with Him, make a place appropriate for His dwelling*. Our Apostolic section reminds us that today, in a primary sense, that dwelling place is none other than our own beings—our bodies in which the Ruach is pleased to dwell, and our communities, in which the power of the Risen Messiah is manifest. The sanctification for which we must strive is a cooperation between our renewed spirits and the Spirit of God. How intent are we in making this dwelling place all that God has instructed that it should be?

Put yourself back into Israel's place as Moses comes asking for contributions. How would you have responded to the request to bring materials for the *Mishkan*? I think any of us would have gladly offered whatever we could to make the *Mishkan* a reality. We would, I think, have given the best we had, and not even considered donating materials which were torn, worn out, or tarnished. Yet God has always looked for the heart of His people to be the place of His dwelling, and we tend to forget that the heart requires ever as much preparation as did the *Mishkan* of old. Do we prepare our hearts with the best which we have, or do we take the left-overs, that which is worn out, tarnished, etc., and attempt to construct a place for His glory to reside? Note well our *Haftarah* (Is 66:1-13)! How is it that we may construct a *Mishkan* fit for God's dwelling? God's dwelling in heaven is all glorious, and the earth is His footstool. But if we should build Him a place where He might rest—where He comes willingly to reside, what is it? "But to this one I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."

We see in this "*Mishkan* preparation" a two fold character. The first is described by the pair of words "humble" (עָנִי) and "contrite" (נָכַר, lit. "smitten") as characterizing one's spirit (רוּחַ). What is a humble and contrite spirit? One who has come to realize that "in me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing" (Rom 7:18), and who has admitted his poverty (עָנִי has as a root meaning "poor" or "impoverished") and thus an inability to "buy" favor with God.

But there is a second characteristic: "who trembles (חָרַד) at My word." חָרַד (*chared*) literally means "to be frightened," "afraid," and is so used in Judg 7:3; 1Sa 4:13; Is 66:5; Ezra 9:4; 10:3 (these are the only other times the verb is used in the Tanach). This word is different than the word often used in combination with God's name (יָרָא, to "fear God", etc.). This word conveys a genuine fear or fright, and in this verse, in regard to (note the use of עַל, "on, upon") God's word. The application is obvious: God desires that we prepare a *Mishkan* of His dwelling in our very beings, a *Mishkan* (soul) that is humble and contrite—a soul that has a genuine fear or fright to transgress or disregard His word.

Now the willingness to observe outward signs of worship is far easier to muster than the heart-felt resolve to worship God in spirit and truth, that is, in fulfilling the *mitzvot* of love and forgiveness, refraining from לשון הרע (*leshon hara*="evil speech or gossip), remaining faithful to what we know is true, and having a firm resolve to accomplish those tasks to which we have been called, regardless of the personal sacrifice it may entail. Trembling at His word means taking it seriously and acting upon it, utilizing the strength He gives to obey what He commands. It means coming to His word with a humble and contrite spirit, ready to learn—to listen. Not coming with one's mind and heart already certain that nothing more can be learned, but admitting that in all of our knowledge we possess only a fraction of the wealth God

has placed in His word! And knowing that the word of God is given, not as an end in itself, but as a means to communion with Him. His word is not the pieces of a game by which, if properly “played,” one might defeat his opponent. His word contains the very instructions by which He intends us to construct for Him a *Mishkan* in which He will dwell, a place where we will commune with Him.

So important is this *Mishkan* that we must constantly be building it—preparing it and making it fit for His rest. Anything that soils it or makes it inappropriate for His presence must be jettisoned from our lives and repudiated as unbecoming a child of God whose primary goal in life is to have on-going communion and friendship with the Creator. May it be so in our lives!

The Articles of the Mishkan

Moses is specifically instructed to make the *Mishkan* and its furniture (כְּלִי) according to the pattern (תְּבִנִית, based on the root בָּנָה, “to build,” thus “model” or “architectural plan”) that was shown to him on Mt. Sinai. We should derive from this that the articles that were to be constructed were specific revelations of God’s purpose for the *Mishkan*. It is not far-fetched, then, to seek to understand more precisely how the form of the articles in the *Mishkan* might reveal more fully God’s plan of atonement as it created a place for His dwelling.

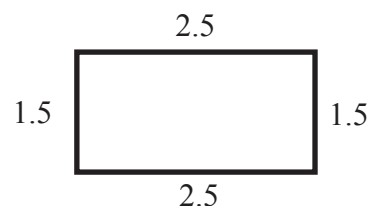
It seems significant to me that the first article of furniture described is the Ark (אֲרוֹן, in v. 22 אֲרוֹן הָעֵדֻת, “Ark of the Testimony”) and its top or “mercy seat” (כַּפֹּרֶת). Thus, the order in which the furniture is described begins in the Most Holy Place, and works its way outward, indicating that the primary goal of the whole *Mishkan* was the activity that would take place in the inner sanctum.

The Ark was to be 1.5 cubits wide, 1.5 cubits deep, and 2.5 cubits long. Many scholars have attempted to demonstrate a precise measurement for the cubit of the Ancient Near East, but none of the studies have been conclusive. Most would put the length of a cubit between 18 and 25 inches. The so-called “royal cubit” is not found in the Tanach, and its mention in texts from Mesopotamia and Egypt indicate that there was a varying standard for this as well. Most scholars today accept a length of 50 c. for the Mesopotamian cubit, and 52.5 c. for the Egyptian cubit (cf. *ABD*, 6:897f). If we accept the 50 c. length (approx. 19.5 inches), then the Ark would have been 29 1/4 inches wide and deep, and 48 3/4 inches long.

Perhaps most significant is the measurement of its breadth (as if one were to wrap a string around its width and length), the total being eight. Eight becomes a significant number in light of the use of seven throughout the Tanach. The system of sabbatical years is concluded by the Jubilee (*Yovel*), which is the year following the completion of a cycle of seven groups of seven years. Likewise, *Shemini Atzeret*, or the eighth day following the festival of Sukkot, functions as the final conclusion of the Torah festival cycle. Thus, the number eight may well function as a symbol of finality. If so, it reminds us that the Ark is symbolic of the place where atonement is made on Yom Kippur, the one time within the festival cycle when full atonement is portrayed.

The Ark was to be made of *acacia* (שִׁטִּים), a tree attested in the Mediterranean regions in four varieties, and was known for its strength and durability. The Ark was to be overlaid inside and out with pure gold (זָהָב טָהוֹר), that is, gold without any admixture of other metals. Its purity symbolized the complete holiness of the One Who would manifest His presence there. Rings into which poles (overlaid with gold) were placed were attached permanently to the Ark, and the poles were to remain in their place. This emphasized the mobility of the Ark, for God would travel in the midst of Israel as they journeyed.

The covering for the Ark is regularly called the “mercy seat” in our English translations. The Hebrew כַּפֹּרֶת, *kapporet*, is built upon the verb כָּפַר, “to cover,” “to wipe clean,” “to atone.” The manner in which “covering” came to mean “atone” is not entirely clear, but a Hebrew idiom that uses our word may be of help in explaining this. In Gen 32:20[21] Jacob, in sending gifts ahead to his approaching brother Esau, says “I will appease him with the present.” The Hebrew translated by “I will appease him” is אֶכַּפֵּר אֶפְנֵי, “I will cover his face.” Here, the basic meaning of *kaphar*, “to cover,” is combined with the idea of “appease.” In the perspective of Jacob, to “cover the face” of Esau with gifts means to give him favor so as to cause him not to “turn his face” toward the former transgressions, i.e.,



his entire attention would be given over to the gifts. But how could the Almighty be “appeased” in regard to sinners? Here, the verb כָּפַר also retains its meaning of “wipe clean,” for the blood applied to the “mercy seat” acts as a cleaning agent to wipe away sin.

This helps us understand the use of *kaphar* in relationship to the Ark. God, Who is enthroned upon the cherubim, is entirely satisfied with the life of the sacrifice, symbolized by the blood put upon the *kapporet*. In this way, the transgressions of Israel are “wiped clean” by the blood of the sacrifice, a life for a life.

The manner in which the Lxx translated כַּפֶּרֶת is significant for the fact that the same word is used of Yeshua in the Apostolic Scriptures. The Lxx used ἱλαστήριον, *hilasterion*, “place of expiation,” “place of propitiation,” to translate כַּפֶּרֶת wherever it is found in the Tanach, which Luther translated as “throne of mercy” or “mercy seat,” followed by later English translations. Since the Ark was considered the throne of the Almighty (cf. 2Sam. 6:2; 2Ki. 19:15; 1Chr. 13:6; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Is. 37:16), this translation is fitting, for it is here that He dispenses His mercy toward sinners.

With the Lxx consistently translating כַּפֶּרֶת by ἱλαστήριον, the fact that we find this same Greek word used by Paul is significant.

whom [i.e., Yeshua] God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; (Rom 3:25)

Here the Apostle essentially describes Yeshua as the כַּפֶּרֶת, the very place where, for millennia, the dramatization of atonement was acted out year after year on Yom Kippur. Thus, the Ark, containing as it did the tablets of the Ten Words, stood as the representation of the covenant between God and Israel. And it was in connection with this covenant that the atonement for the sins of the nation was made. In whatever measure the nation had not lived in accordance with the covenant, the sacrifice made on her behalf made atonement.

It was not as though the animal sacrifice “covered” the sins, awaiting the time when Yeshua’s sacrifice would remove them. Rather, the animal sacrifice on Yom Kippur constantly represented the ultimate and final sacrifice of Yeshua. As such, God reckoned the sacrifice of Yeshua to all those who, by faith, accepted God’s means of atonement. Their faith, like ours, was in the redemption that God Himself would provide.

To the כַּפֶּרֶת were attached two figures representing cherubim (כְּרֻבִים), with wings arching over the Ark, facing each other, but with their faces looking down upon the Ark. The first mention of cherubim in the Tanach is in the Genesis narrative, where, after Adam and Chavah are expelled from Gan Eden, cherubim are stationed at the entrance of the garden to guard it with flaming swords, and particularly to guard the Tree of Life that was in the garden (Gen 3:24). This role of guarding seems fitting for their symbolic representation over the Ark. As ministers of the Most High, they guard (as it were) His throne room. The story of Nadav and Avihu, who were struck dead by a “fire that came out from the presence of Adonai” (Lev 10:2), gives a fitting illustration of what would happen to anyone who approached the throne room of the Almighty in an unworthy manner. Thus, the sanctum of the Ark is guarded by the ministering angels.

The concluding verse of these initial instructions regarding the Ark and its covering is most interesting (25:22):

There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel.

It is certain that subsequent revelation would prohibit anyone coming into the Most Holy Place except the Cohen Gadol, and then only on Yom Kippur. Yet this concluding verse seems to indicate that Moses himself enters the Most Holy Place to receive commandments directly from God, which he would then transmit to the people of Israel. Rashi, sensing this problem, suggests that the voice of God emanated from the mercy seat, and came directly to Moses as he stood in the outer sanctum. This may be a correct interpretation, but it may also be that before the institution of the High Priesthood and the ceremonies of the *Mishkan*, Moses did approach the Ark directly. We know from Ex 34:33ff that when Moses would enter the *Mishkan* “to speak with Adonai,” that

he would remove the veil from his face, and afterward, when he came forth from the tent, his face would be shining as it was when he descended from Mt. Sinai. In other words, Moses would talk with God in the *Mishkan* in the same manner as he did on the mountain. It is from this text, which emphasized the “meeting” of God with Moses, that the *Mishkan* became known as the “tent of meeting” (אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד).

I do not think it too far fetched to suggest that this arrangement foreshadowed the work of our Messiah Yeshua and His presence before the Father as the High Priest of His people. For as we know, the priesthood would be attached to the family of Aaron, not that of Moses, and thus Moses acts as a “high priest,” not on the basis of physical lineage, but by direct appointment of God Himself. Yet Moses enters the *Mishkan* and the Most Holy Place, there to speak directly to God Who manifests His visible presence over the Ark, between the cherubim. Moreover, when Moses came forth from the *Mishkan*, his face shown with the glory of God even as it did when he descended from Mt. Sinai. Likewise, Yeshua, Who does not have His high priestly office on the basis of physical lineage but by divine appointment (Heb 8:4), now “appears in the presence of God for us” (Heb 9:24). And Paul, comparing our Messiah to Moses, speaks of the “glory of God shining in the face of Yeshua” (2Cor 4:6), once again paralleling Moses.

But why would Moses need to enter the tent of meeting to receive further instructions from God? Had not God given the Torah to Moses on the mountain? Most likely, what was needed were instructions and commandments for the application of the Torah in various life settings. We see Moses petitioning Adonai regarding the inheritance of the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27), as well as what to do with the man who was gathering wood on the Sabbath (Num 15). In each of these cases, Moses receives direct communication from God as to the application of various Torah commandments. Thus, once Moses received further specifics from God, explicating the application of the Torah already given, these became part of the written Torah for future generations.

The *Mishkan*, then, was to function in its primary duty of creating a place where God and Israel could meet (through Israel’s chosen representatives)—where God’s holiness remained unblemished, and where atonement was made for Israel’s sins. The table of the bread of presence, the altar of incense, and the golden menorah, all add to the symbolism of the *Mishkan* as a movable Mt. Sinai. Like the elders who ascended the mountain, so the representatives of Israel (the priests) would maintain a “covenant meal” with God. Like the cloud on Sinai, so the altar of incense would create a cloud. And like the fire of Sinai, so the menorah would give forth its light. In all of these, the very glory of God, first seen on the mountain, would dwell among men. Here, as we shall see in the coming *parashot*, is the continuing revelation of Immanuel.

