

Parashah Sixty-Four

Exodus 26:31–27:19; Ezekiel 16:10–19; Hebrews 8:1–6

notes by Tim Hegg

... *that I May Dwell Among Them*

The previous parashah contains the statement of HaShem upon which the entire meaning and purpose of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) rests: Exodus 25:8, “Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them.” In contrast to all of the pagan gods who dwelt in seclusion, far away from mortal man, HaShem, known as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has as His eternal purpose to dwell in the midst of His people. The reason the pagan gods do not want much to do with mankind, and will come close only when enticed by offerings, etc., is that they fear common man will make them common. Rather than soil their reputation with the lowly domain of mortals, the demon gods live in seclusion (or so the myth goes) maintaining their “grandeur” unsoiled.

But the God of Israel has no fear of being changed: He is the Unchanged One, and the One who brings about change. He comes to dwell with His people not for His own advantage, for He is in need of nothing, but for the sake of mankind. He comes to bring to them the ability to fulfill their creative purpose—to know Him, and to be known of Him. He comes to give them not only salvation from their foes, but eternal salvation for their souls, offering unparalleled joys in this world and in the world to come.

But His coming to dwell with man requires that man prepare Him a place—a sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ, *miqdash*), a place set apart—a “holy” place, for His coming. In all of His eternal love, He is never diminished in His infinite holiness. Here, in the dwelling of God with man, is the focal point of all the Torah. Every regulation, every clean and unclean stipulation, the Shabbat and all the Moe-dim—all of it focuses inevitably upon this one thing: creating a holy place for God to dwell in our midst.

Yet even the *Miqdash*, the *Mishkan* constructed according to God’s plan—even this is not the end in itself. For the dwelling of God with man will not be seen in all of its fullness until sin is no more, and the ‘*olam haba* (world to come) is a reality. There, in the new heavens and earth, there will no longer be the need for a *Mishkan* or a *Heichal* (Temple). No more will there be levels of holiness so clearly delineated in the Tabernacle and subsequent Temples. In the ‘*olam haba* all will be holy as He is holy; all will be sanctified and fully set apart to Him. There will be no need for separation, because there will be no uncleanness. John alerts us to this when, in describing the new Jerusalem, he says: “I saw no temple in it, for Adonai El Elyon and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev 21:22).

But until that time, if God is to dwell among His people, sinners as they are, there must be a place of holiness, a *Miqdash*, for His dwelling. This is pictured first in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), then in the *Heichal* (Temple) and finally in Yeshua in Whom the fullness of God dwelt in bodily form (Colossians 2:9). In the incarnation this mystery of the dwelling of God with man took on the most profound measures, for in His humanity He yet remained one with HaShem, and in this mystery demonstrated in the most awesome of ways the purpose of God to dwell among His people.

But how is God dwelling with us now? How can His presence be in our midst if there is no *Miqdash*? On the one hand, He dwells with us as He has always dwelt with His people, in His Ruach (Spirit). Again, mysteriously, the presence of God is evident in the indwelling Spirit of God. Urg-

ing, comforting, leading, convicting, illuminating—all of these activities of the Spirit are the inevitable result of God’s presence with us. But His presence with us in the Spirit of Messiah (by whom Yeshua is also present with us, Matt 28:19-20), is not in the same measure as His presence will be in our midst when the *Miqdash* is re-established. And His presence in the coming *Miqdash* is not as full as in the ‘*olam haba*. In each case, the one hastens to the other, and we therefore all await the final victory in the world to come, and the complete, unhindered presence of the Almighty.

If then the Tabernacle and Temple are given to teach us about the presence of God among His people, and therefore are foreshadows of Yeshua Himself (Who embodied the presence of God with man), how are we to “unpack” the message God intends? First, we should be cautioned away from the idea that every minute detail of the Tabernacle must have some reference to the person or work of Yeshua. Some, believing this to be true, have resorted to silly interpretations of the Tabernacle and its furnishings to find a link to Yeshua. More than likely, the specific descriptions of the Tabernacle, and its ornate furnishings, were simply to teach that the place of God’s dwelling among men is unique—unlike any other. This, perhaps more than anything, points to the uniqueness of Yeshua as the “only begotten Son of God.”

But there is another “big picture” lesson to learn as well: that God dwells with His people, but He does so only according to His terms and not theirs. The precise detail required in the *Mishkan* should remind us that God, not man, has designed the manner in which He will dwell with His people. All too often we fall into thinking that as long as we do “our best” or build His dwelling “with honest intentions,” this will be acceptable. If there is an overarching lesson we learn from the *Mishkan*, it is that God defines His dwelling place, not man. We must therefore seek to conform to His ways if we intend to make a place for Him to dwell with us.

Likewise, we learn that He actually provides His people with the means to follow His instructions to build Him a dwelling place. He reveals to them His exact instructions and inspires craftsmen (such as Bezalel) by His Ruach in order that the *Mishkan* might be built as He required. Thus, the building of the Tabernacle was a cooperation between God and His redeemed ones. In similar manner, our own growth in holiness is a partnership with God. He has recreated us, and empowered us by His Spirit for holiness, but He commands us to engage in the disciplines of holiness in order to grow spiritually. We are to “grow in the grace and knowledge” of our Master (2Pet 3:18). This involves regular study and application of the Scriptures, consistent prayer and worship, yielding ourselves to the will of God, serving Him through obedience by doing the *mitzvot*, and guarding our hearts from the entanglements of the world.

It is instructive to note that commands given to Moses regarding the construction of the *Mishkan* (which began in the previous *parashah* and continue in the present one) are done so from the perspective of God Himself. That is, the instructions begin with the Ark, proceed to the veil (כַּפֹּרֶת, *k'poret*), then to the Holy Place and its furnishing, then to the doorway and coverings of the *Mishkan* itself, and finally to the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard and the barrier of pillars and hangings that separated the entire structure from the common space of the Israelite camp. The instructions start in the Most Holy Place, where the presence of God dwelt over the Cherubim, and works its way out to the courtyard where the people would congregate. This, once again, emphasizes the method of God’s self-revelation: man does not find God, but God reveals Himself to man.

Thus, in our *parashah*, we are specifically instructed about the veil that would separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, the Altar of Sacrifice, and the manner in which the courtyard would be separated by a surrounding “fence” made of pillars draped with linen cloth.

The altar was to be 5 cubits square, thus measuring about 7.5 feet on each side. It was 3 cubits high, making it about 4.5 feet high. The wood (*acacia*, very strong) was overlaid with bronze. Bronze was used extensively in the Ancient Near East, being easily alloyed and able to withstand higher temperatures. Some take the bronze netting to describe a kind of “grating” for the fire box, while others (mostly rabbinic) take it to be decorative on the outside of the Altar. Whatever the case, it is clear that the Altar could be disassembled, making it easier to carry.

The placement of the Altar is clear: it is to be just inside the opening of the courtyard, that is, the first thing encountered by the worshippers. This emphasizes the centrality of the Altar, and thus of sacrifice in the whole scheme of Israelite worship. That the laver is put further inside the courtyard, and not in front of the Altar shows that the washing required was connected with taking the sacrifice (symbolized by the blood) into the *Mishkan*, not for preparation to offer the sacrifice. That is, the laver is not for the Israelite, but for the priest. Thus, sacrifice precedes cleansing in the Israelite *Mishkan* and not *visa versa*.

That the *Mishkan* itself is divided into two compartments is seen to be very important in the whole outline of Exodus and the Torah. The veil that separated the two areas is described in detail, being woven of the same materials as the other inner tapestries, and having the design of cherubim woven into it. It was to be hung upon four pillars which were placed so that the veil would hang immediately under the clasps which joined the coverings of the *Mishkan*. There is no indication that it was in any way divided, so entrance into the Most Holy Place must have been at the side.

When Solomon built the first Temple, he did not divide the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place with a veil, but with a solid wall one cubit thick, into which were hung doors as an entrance into the Most Holy Place. The exact method of hanging the doors and their style is debated (cf. 1Kings 6:31-32), but they were of such a value that Hezekiah was compelled to give them as tribute to the King of Assyria (2Kings 18:16). They may have been 20-30 feet tall. Being overlaid with gold meant they rivalled any doors of any temple in the Ancient Near East, and would have been very heavy.

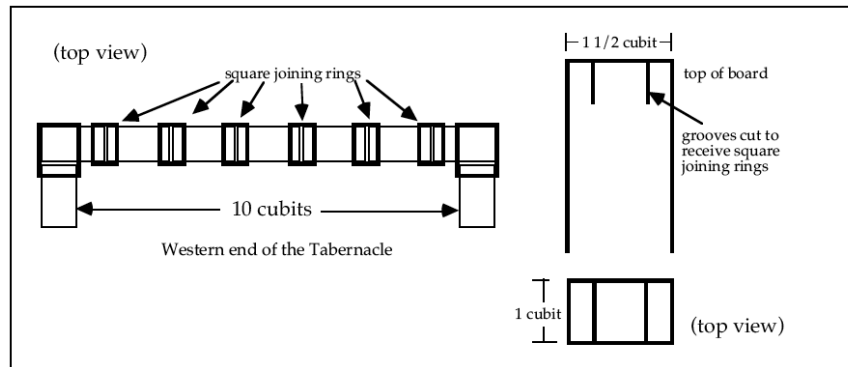


Figure 1

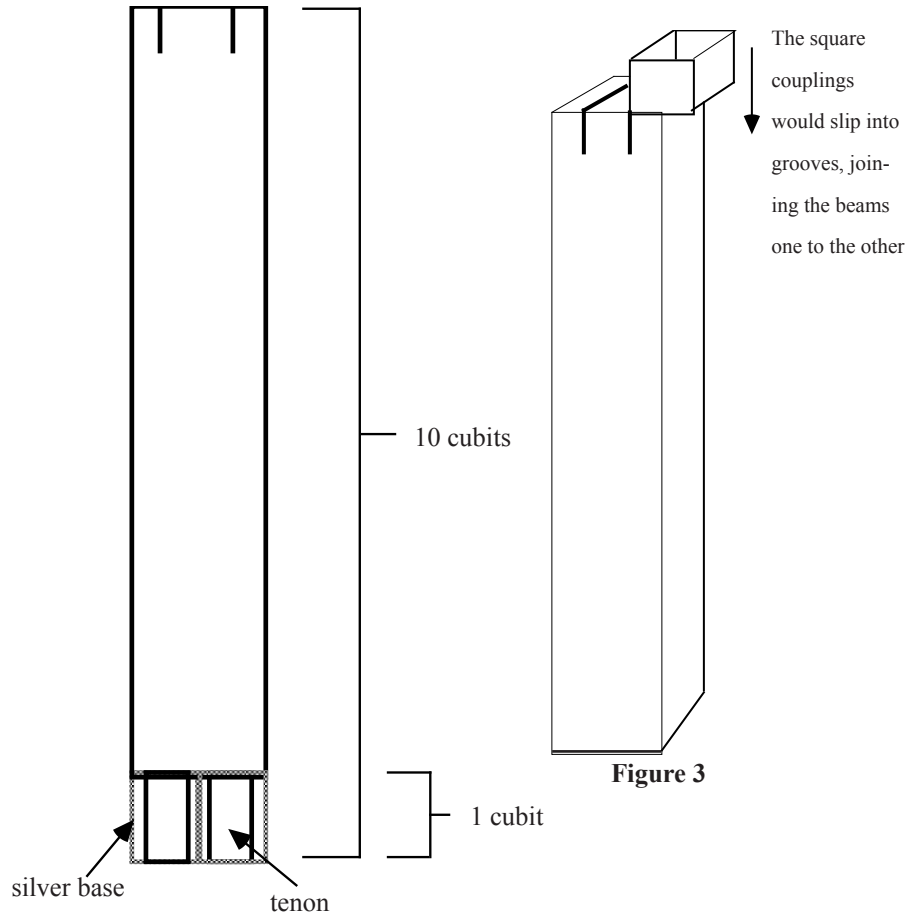


Figure 2

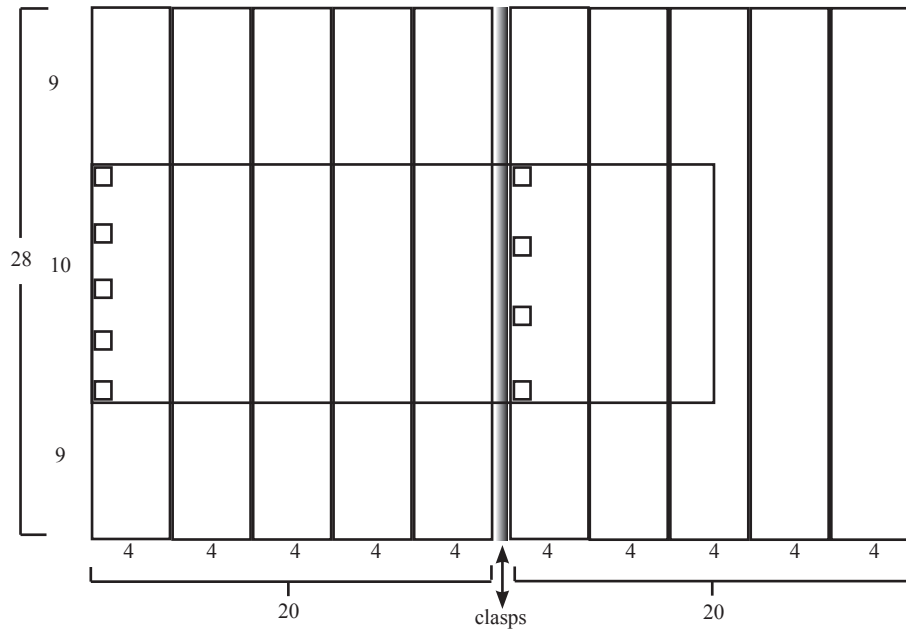


Figure 4
Coverings (Tapestries) of the *Mishcan*

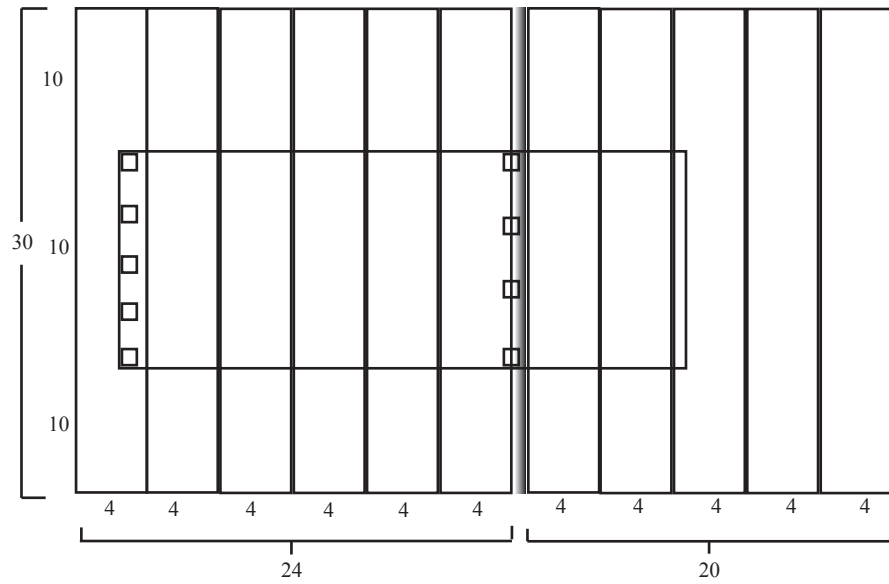


Figure 5
Outer (woollen) Coverings of the *Mishcan*

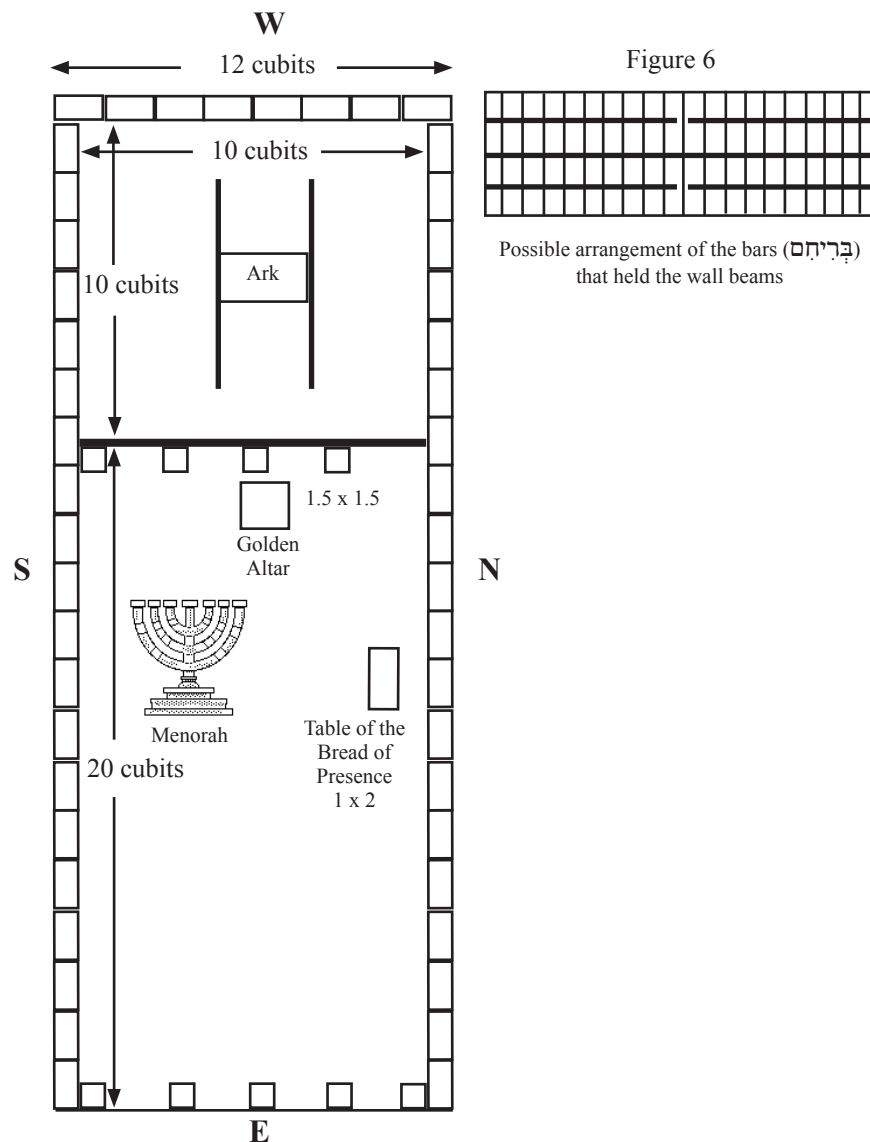


Figure 7

There are a number of issues that confront us when we attempt to understand all of the construction details given to Moses. It seems clear, however, that those things about which we cannot be certain were made clear to Moses by having seen the model of the Tabernacle on the mountain.

First, the idea that there was some type of interwoven frames to secure the top of each of the beams is speculative, but seems to be implied by 26:24 where it states of the corner beams that they were “joined together at the top” with a ring (טַבַּעַת). The special notice regarding the corners must be that the corner beams had a special mortise at the top for connecting the two walls.

Second, it is never stated whether the pillars that hold the *perochet* separating the Holy and Most Holy are inside or outside of the veil. Figure 6 has them on the outside, but others think they were on the inside. The arrangement of the tapestries and the outer woollen covers were such that the clasps of each did not fall directly upon each other. The outer coverings consisted of 11 panels, while the tapestries were only 10 panels. The eleventh panel of the outer covering folded in half over the front of the *mishkan*. This shifted the entire covering two cubits, so that the clasps of the outer coverings were two cubits offset from the inner tapestries. The exact reason for this is not

stated, but it would have kept light from coming in through the seam, making the only light in the Most Holy Place that of the *Shekinah*, and in the Holy Place that of the *menorah*.

Third, for the arrangement of the pillars holding the *perochet* and the outer veil or curtain there are given no specific details. Were they an equal distance apart? It is clear that the *perochet* was not divided (as is typical of a modern-day stage curtain), so the *cohen gadol* would have entered from the side rather than from the middle. It may have been that the pillars were arranged to accommodate this, and they are so arranged in Figure 6. The pillars at the opening of the *Mishkan* may have been evenly arranged, since there were five in a 10 cubit span.

The silver sockets into which the beams were placed to form the walls of the *Mishkan* were one talent of silver each (Ex 38:27). A talent was approximately 150 lbs., and calculating the size of the beam (1 x 1.5 cubits), and presuming the sockets were the same width and half the length (since there were two per beam), it is clear that they were hollow in order to receive the tendons of the beams. If the dimensions were 1x1x1.5 cubits, the walls of the sockets would have been approximately .9 cm thick. Rashi taught that they were 1/4 cubit thick, which would mean that the walls of the socket would also need to be hollow, for solid walls 1/4 cubit thick would result in the base weighing nine talents (or 1382 lbs.).

As we study the specific instructions given for the construction of the *Mishkan*, we are struck with how detailed they were, how costly the construction was, and how the whole arrangement was marked by ornate beauty befitting a King. In the middle of the desert, where the arid conditions made life difficult, a “palace” was erected, for the King desired to go with His people and to turn the desert into a place of joy and fellowship. And the palace was not simply for His dwelling, but a place where He welcomed the people in, meeting with them (as symbolized in the priesthood, the Bread of the Presence, and the sweet smell of incense), offering them the assurance of His faithful protection.