



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Vayakhel (ויקהל, "and he assembled")**
- **Chapters: Exodus 35:1-38:20**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Note: Vayakhel is combined with parashat Pekudei during non-leap years (i.e., in years when there is *no* additional month of Adar inserted into the calendar).

Synopsis

According to Jewish tradition, Moses descended from Sinai (with the second set of tablets) on Yom Kippur, and on the following morning he convened the people to explain God's instructions regarding building the Mishkan (i.e., Tabernacle). Before he did so, however, he again reminded them to observe the Sabbath as a day of complete rest, with the added provision that they may not kindle any fire on this day. Moses then asked for contributions of gold, silver, bronze, and other materials for the construction of the sanctuary and its furnishings. This was to be a free-will offering (נְדָבָה זְבָחָה) made by those "whose heart so moved him." As a sign of their complete *teshuvah* (repentance) for the sin of the Golden Calf, the people gave with such generosity that Moses finally had to ask them to stop giving!

Betzalel and Oholiav were appointed to be the chief artisans of the Mishkan, and they led a team of others that created the roof coverings, frame, wall panels, and foundation sockets for the tent. They also created the *parochet* (veil) that separated the Holy Place (*ha'kodesh*) from the Holy of Holies (*kodesh ha'kodeshim*). Both the roof and the veil were designed with embroidered *cherubim* (winged angelic beings). Betzalel then created the Ark of the Covenant and its cover called the mercy seat (*kapporet*), which was the sole object that would occupy the innermost chamber of the Holy of Holies. Betzalel also made the three sacred furnishings for the Holy Place – the Table of Bread (*shulchan*), the lamp (*menorah*), and the Altar of Incense (*mizbe'ach ha'katoret*) – as well as the anointing oil that would consecrate these furnishings.

Betzalel then created the Copper (or bronze) Altar for burnt offerings (along with its implements) and the Copper Basin from the mirrors of women who ministered in the entrance of the tent of meeting. He then formed the courtyard by installing the hangings, posts and foundation sockets, and created the three-colored gate that was used to access the courtyard.



Basic Questions

1. After he descended the mountain with the second set of tablets, what was the first commandment Moses delivered to the people? ¹
2. What restriction was added to the Fourth Commandment at this time? ²
3. Who was appointed to be the head of all the craftsmen in the building of the Mishkan? ³
4. How did Betzalel know how to construct the Tabernacle? ⁴
5. When Moses asked the people to make a “free will offering” to God for the sake of the sanctuary, what happened? ⁵
6. According to Jewish tradition, when did Moses instruct the people regarding the building of the Mishkan? ⁶
7. According to the sages, why does the Torah place the commandment to cease work on Shabbat right before the description of the work required to make the Mishkan? ⁷
8. What was the “mistake” of the tribal leaders regarding the donation? ⁸
9. What gift did the tribal leaders finally offer? ⁹
10. From what objects was the Copper Basin made? ¹⁰
11. What is the parochet? ¹¹
12. What was placed inside the Ark? ¹²
13. *Bonus question:* One of the foods we customarily eat on Shabbat is fish. Why? ¹³



הַבַּיּוֹר הַנְּחֹשֶׁת
Bronze (or copper) Basin

¹ To observe the Sabbath day. This mirrors Moses’ earlier experience of having the Fourth Commandment repeated to him just before God gave him the first set of Tablets (Exod. 31:12-17).

² Not to kindle a fire in your dwelling places on the Sabbath (Exod. 35:3, though cp. Exod. 16:23).

³ Betzalel, the son of Uri, son of Hur, from the tribe of Judah (Moses’ grand-nephew [Hur was married to Miriam]).

⁴ The Spirit of God imparted him with wisdom (*chokhmah*), understanding (*tevunah*), and knowledge (*da’at*) - the same attributes used to describe God as the Creator of the Universe (Exod. 35:31; Prov. 3:19-20).

⁵ They gave willingly and with such generosity that Moses finally told them to stop giving!

⁶ On the day after Yom Kippur (i.e., Tishri 11).

⁷ In order to teach us what work cannot be done on the Sabbath day.

⁸ They postponed giving, but the people’s donations were so lavish there was nothing left for them to give! The Torah indicates this by misspelling the name for “leaders” (לְיִשְׂרָאֵל).

⁹ Wagons, oxen, and the precious gems for the choshen (breastplate of the High Priest). Exod. 35:27

¹⁰ From mirrors of the women. Moses at first objected to this, but God overruled his decision.

¹¹ The veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies in the tent (ohel).

¹² The second luchot (tablets) along with the broken pieces of the first set.

¹³ The word “fish” in Hebrew is “dag” (דָּג), the numerical value of which is seven, which represents the seventh day of the week, that is, Shabbat.



Discussion Topics

1. The word vayakhel (וַיִּקְהַל) means to “assemble” or to “congregate” (a congregation is called a *kehillah*). The word *first* appears in the Torah when the people “assembled” before Aaron to demand that he make an idol to lead the people in the desert (Exod. 32:1). It appears the *second* time when the people assembled to create the Mishkan. Some of the sages have said that the word is *repeated* to indicate that the cycle of apostasy and rebellion had past. Discuss the merits of this view.
2. Donations for the Mishkan were to come from “everyone whose heart is so moved” (Exod. 35:5). This is called a “free-will offering” (נְדָבָה זְבָחָה). Discuss the importance of motive in giving to God. What is the difference between “giving from a heart” rather than giving from fear or obligation?
3. God repeated the law of Sabbath just before He handed Moses the original set of tablets that contained the Ten Commandments (Exod. 31:12-17). Moreover, the prohibition to work on the Sabbath was given immediately before the Moses gave the instructions for building the sanctuary. The sages claim that this juxtaposition was not accidental and was intended to define what constituted “work” (*melakhah*). How important is the idea of the Sabbath day to you? How do you define “work” and “rest”? How are we to understand the idea of these concepts in light of the finished work of Yeshua (i.e., the New Covenant)?
4. Discuss how Betzalel may be seen as a “type” or picture of the Messiah.
5. The glow on Moses’ face first appeared after he descended Sinai with the second set of tablets, which, according to Jewish tradition, was on Yom Kippur. In other words, the glow was a consequence of understanding God’s forgiveness and love, despite the breach caused by the sin of the Golden Calf. Discuss how the glow on Moses’ face reflected the glory of the New Covenant – and therefore was the glory of Yeshua.
6. Almost all of Parashat Vayakhel (and much of Pekudei) consists of information already given in earlier portions of the Torah when God first gave Moses the vision of the Mishkan. Why, then, does the Torah engage in such seemingly unnecessary repetition? As one sage noted, the entire construction of the Mishkan could have been summed up with the statement, “And Betzalel the son of Uri the son of Hur carried out the work of the Mishkan as God had commanded Moses...” In addition, why is the sequence of the instructions regarding the Mishkan *reversed* from the earlier portions?

For Next Week:

- Read parashat **Pekudei** (i.e., Exodus 38:21-40:38)
- Read the Haftarah (I Kings 7:51-8:21)
- Read the New Testament (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Hebrews 13:10)

