

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



Produced by THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
Copyright © 2001 by the Rabbinical Assembly

Copyright © 2001 by The Rabbinical Assembly

*Hebrew text, based on Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,
© 1999 by The Jewish Publication Society*

English translation © 1985, 1999 by The Jewish Publication Society

First edition. All rights reserved

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, except for brief passages in connection with a critical review, without permission in writing from:

*The Rabbinical Assembly
3080 Broadway
New York, NY 10027*

*Blessings for the Torah and haftiarot have been adapted from
Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals, © 2000 by The Rabbinical Assembly.
Maps © by Oxford University Press, supplied by Oxford Cartographers. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.
Illustrations of the tabernacle and its furnishings by Joe Sikora.*

*Composition by VARDA Graphics, Skokie, Illinois
Design by Adrienne Onderdonk Dudden
Manufactured in the United States of America*

09 10 10 9 8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bible. O.T. Pentateuch. Hebrew. 2001.

Etz Hayim: Torah and commentary / senior editor, David L. Lieber; literary editor, Jules Harlow; sponsored by the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

p. cm.

Text of the Pentateuch in Hebrew and English; commentary in English.

Includes the haftiarot and commentary on them, p'shat and d'rash commentaries, comments on Conservative halakhic practice, topical essays, and other material.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-10: 0-8276-0712-1 ISBN-13: 978-0-8276-0712-5

1. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch—Commentaries. 2. Haftiarot—Commentaries. 3. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch—Theology. 4. Conservative Judaism—Customs and practices. I. Lieber, David L. II. Harlow, Jules. III. United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. IV. Rabbinical Assembly. V. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch. English. Jewish Publication Society, 2001. VI. Title.

BS1222 .L54 2001

222'.1077—dc21

2001029757

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
Copyright © 2001 by the Rabbinical Assembly

THE TABERNACLE, PART I: INSTRUCTIONS (25:1–31:17)

The narrative that describes the building and the functioning of this sanctuary is divided into two parts: a series of detailed instructions (25:1–31:17) and an account of its construction (35:1–40:38). Between these two sections is the episode of the Golden Calf.

The tabernacle (see diagram, p. 1520) is an oblong structure comprising the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the Outer Court. A perimeter demarcates this entire sacred area, which is divided into two equal squares. The first two zones—the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place—lie in one

square; the Outer Court constitutes the other. From the ark in the Holy of Holies, God reaches out to the Israelites; from the altar of sacrifice in the Outer Court, the Israelites reach out to God.

MATERIALS (25:1–9)

The account opens with a list of the basic materials needed for the construction and operation of the tabernacle. All are to be acquired through public donations.

1. The LORD spoke to Moses During the 40 days he was on Mount Sinai.

The last third of the Book of Exodus concerns itself entirely (except for the incident of the Golden Calf) with the construction of the tabernacle, a portable shrine to house the Ark and the Tablets of the Pact. After the life-altering experience of standing at Sinai, how does one keep the feeling of Sinai present? It can be maintained with sacred deeds, daily acts of justice, and compassion as outlined in the previous *parashah*, *Mishpatim*. It can be accomplished by maintaining the observance of sacred time, on *Shabbat* and holy days. Or it can be maintained with sacred space, fashioning a physical site to represent the presence of God in the midst of the community. Typically, the Torah and later Jewish usage will blend all three modes—sacred deeds, space, and time—into an integrated way of life. “The ultimate goal is to break through the barriers and come into the presence of God. But that goal is not attained in an instant. There is a ladder of spiritual ascent . . . alluded to in the prayer which precedes the *Sh'ma* in our morning service, where the text moves from the study of Torah to the performance of *mitzvot* to bonding with God” (Schorsch).

Mount Sinai does not retain its holiness after the Israelites move on. It does not become a site of pilgrimage. The mountain is not holy; God is holy, and God's Presence is what makes a place holy. When the people leave Sinai, they do not leave God. God accompanies them on their journey, and the tabernacle is to be a symbol of that. The later Temples, built in Jerusa-

lem by Solomon and by the Jews returning from Babylonia, did not follow the plan given here. Different generations build their houses of worship in ways appropriate to their own times and needs.

Abravanel suggests that one purpose of the tabernacle was to combat the idea that God had forsaken the earth, choosing to reside exclusively in heaven, remote from humanity. The Sages calculated that the command to build a tabernacle was given on *Yom Kippur*, the 10th of *Tishrei* (Tanḥ. 8). The tabernacle would be a “tent of witness” to the fact that God was still in Israel's midst even when they fall short of what they had promised to be. There is also a tradition that the instructions to fashion a tabernacle actually were given after the events recounted in Exod. 32, when the Israelites made the Golden Calf. (The Torah does not always present events in strict chronologic order.) The tabernacle would then serve as a Tent of Witness to the reality of penitence and forgiveness. The incident of the Golden Calf becomes less of a threat to sever the relationship between God and Israel when we know beforehand that reconciliation will follow.

Following the latter tradition stated above, Levi Yitzḥak of Berdichev suggests that God has to command Moses to speak to the Israelites, because Moses is so angry at them after the incident of the Golden Calf. God has to remind him that a leader should never give up on his people, no matter how much they may disappoint him.

the Israelite people to bring Me gifts; you shall accept gifts for Me from every person whose heart so moves him.³ And these are the gifts that you shall accept from them: gold, silver, and copper;⁴ blue, purple, and crimson yarns, fine linen, goats' hair;⁵ tanned ram skins, dolphin

2 דִּבַּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ-לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל-אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לְבוֹ תִקְחוּ אֶת-תְּרוּמָתִי: 3 וְזֹאת הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְחוּ מֵאֲתָם זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְנְחֹשֶׁת: 4 וְתִכְלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ וְעִזִּים: 5 וְעֹרֹת אֵילִם מֵאֲדָמִים וְעֶרְת

2. the Israelite people Because the sanctuary will serve the entire community, its construction is to be made possible through the generosity of all the people.

gifts The Hebrew word *t'rumah* refers specifically to that which is set aside by its owner and dedicated for sacred use.

3. The metals are listed in descending order of value. The closer the object is to the Holy of Holies, the more valuable the metal of which it is made.

copper Better: bronze (a stronger alloy of copper and tin), used extensively in the Near East as early as the 3rd millennium B.C.E.; as in English, the Hebrew term comprises both substances.

4. blue, purple, and crimson yarns These were the most expensive dyed yarns in the ancient world. They were to be used for the tabernacle hangings and coverings and for the priestly vestments.

blue In the Bible, the Hebrew word *t'kheilet* (blue) often is paired with the word "*argaman*"

(purple). Both were dyes produced from a marine snail that exudes a yellow fluid, which becomes a dye in the red-purple range when exposed to sunlight. Thousands of snails were required to produce sufficient dye for one robe. Possession of those dyed fabrics was a mark of wealth, nobility, and royalty.

crimson Hebrew: *tola-at shani*. The first word means "a worm"; the second signifies the color. The two words together designate the brilliant red dye produced from the eggs of certain insects that feed on oak trees.

fine linen Hebrew: *shesh*; Egyptian in origin, refers to cloth of exceptional quality.

goats' hair It grows in long locks and was left undyed. The spinning of goat's hair was a highly specialized skill of women.

5. tanned ram skins The use of animal hides and skins for human needs is ancient. The Bible refers to leather quite often, although it never describes the technique of its production.

CHAPTER 25

2. to bring Me gifts Hebrew: *v'yikhu li*. Gifts from what was originally Mine, and which I shared with you. The gold, silver, and jewels that the Israelites would give were taken from the Egyptians when they left Egypt. They were not to be used for personal benefit but for something holy and transcendent. The verb here translated "bring" (*v'yikhu*) literally means "take." One who gives receives something in return—the sense of being generous and making a worthy undertaking possible, the sense of sharing with others in an important venture, the sense of self-worth that comes from knowing that we can give away something of value without feeling diminished.

The word *t'rumah* (gift, offering) comes from a root meaning "to elevate." It originally referred to the physical act of lifting up that which was being offered. It can also imply that the act of offering a gift to God elevates the donor to a higher level as well (Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev). Those who collect for charitable

purposes must do so with only pure and noble purposes in mind, but those who give to charity may do so even for less worthy reasons; the act of giving will purify them (Shalom of Kaminka). One commentator asks why the laws of *Mishpatim* directly precede the offering of *T'rumah* and suggests it teaches that only after we make our living honestly can we give any proceeds to charity.

8. I may dwell among them God's presence is not found in a building. It is found in the hearts and souls of the people who fashion and sanctify the building. A *midrash* suggests that the tabernacle was fashioned to meet God's needs as well as Israel's. It tells of a king who gave his only daughter in marriage to a prince from another country. He told his daughter, "I cannot prevent you from moving away with your husband, but it grieves me to have you leave. Do this for me, then. Wherever you live, build an apartment for me so that I can come and visit you." Thus God says to Israel, "Wherever you travel, build a shrine for Me that I may dwell among you" (Exod. R. 33:1).

skins, and acacia wood; ⁶oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense; ⁷lapis lazuli and other stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. ⁸And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them. ⁹Exactly as I show you—the pattern of the Tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings—so shall you make it.

¹⁰They shall make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. ¹¹Overlay it with pure gold—overlay it inside and out—and

תְּחָשִׂים וְעֵצֵי שֵׁטִים: ⁶שֶׁמֶן לַמָּאֵר
בְּשָׂמִים לְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה וְלִקְטֹרֶת
הַסָּמִים: ⁷אֲבִנֵי-שֹׁהַם וְאֲבִנֵי מִלֻּאִים
לְאֵפֶד וְלַחֹשֶׁן: ⁸וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וּשְׂכֵנֹתַי
בְּתוֹכָם: ⁹כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר אָנִי מֵרְאֶה אוֹתְךָ
אֵת תְּבִנֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֵת תְּבִנֹת כָּל-כֵּלָיו
וְכֵן תַּעֲשׂוּ: ס

וַעֲשׂוּ אֲרוֹן עֵצֵי שֵׁטִים אֲמֹתַיִם וְחֻצֵי
אֲרָבֹו וְאֲמָה וְחֻצֵי רַחְבּוֹ וְאֲמָה וְחֻצֵי
קִמְתּוֹ: ¹¹וְצִפִּיתָ אוֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר מִבֵּית

dolphin skins The Hebrew word *t'hashim* more likely means “dyed sheep or goat leather.”

acacia wood There are about 800 species of acacias. Only a few have a straight trunk suitable for cutting timbers used in construction. These yield hard, durable planks that are lightweight.

6. oil Later specified as olive oil.

for lighting This oil was used only in the lamps, not for food preparation or anointing.

spices The aromatic oil was to be used to consecrate the tabernacle, its vessels, and its personnel for the service of God.

7. These semiprecious stones are to adorn the vestments of the priests.

8. All these materials are being collected for use in the construction of a sanctuary (*mikdash*), a term that defines an area clearly enclosed and recognized as sacred space. In later Hebrew, the term *Mikdash*—or *Beit ha-Mikdash*—became the familiar designation for the Temple in Jerusalem.

dwell among them Note that for His “indwelling” God had specific requirements that needed to be followed precisely. The text does not tell of God dwelling “in it,” i.e., in the sanctuary, but “among them,” i.e., among the people Israel. The literal meaning of *shakhan* is “to rest,” not “to dwell.” The sanctuary is not meant to be taken literally as God’s abode; God dwells in heaven. The sanctuary makes tangible the concept of the indwelling of the divine Presence, God’s immanence, in the camp of Israel, a presence to which the people may direct their hearts and minds.

9. Exactly as I show you The tabernacle and its furnishings are conceived of as earthly replicas of heavenly archetypes or as constructions based on divinely given blueprints and pictorial representations. Both notions are found earlier in the ancient Near East and elsewhere in the Bible (see 1 Chron. 28:11–19; Ezek. 40–42).

THE ARK (vv. 10–16)

The directions for constructing the tabernacle commence with the order to fashion an ark. It will permanently house the two stone tablets of the Decalogue that God is giving to Moses (24:12). The ark, therefore, is the focus of the entire enterprise. It is the ark and its contents, the symbol of the covenant between God and Israel, that give meaning to the tabernacle.

10. an ark A wooden chest open at the top. The Hebrew *aron* here is not the same word used for Noah’s ark, which is *tevah*.

cubits One cubit is the distance between the elbow and the tip of the middle finger of an average-size person. The standard biblical cubit is about 18 inches (45 cm.). Thus the ark’s external dimensions were approximately 3¾ feet (110 cm.) long, 2¼ feet (70 cm.) wide, and 2¼ feet (70 cm.) high.

11. Overlay it Some of the Sages described it as a nest of three separate chests of varying dimensions; one of wood and two of gold. The main, wooden chest, referred to in verse 10, was inserted inside one gold chest, which became its

10. make an ark The Sages find numerous linguistic and thematic parallels between the making of the tabernacle and the creation of the world, as if the tabernacle were a microcosm of the universe. To fashion sacred space is to create a separate world within God’s uni-

verse. Here the Sages play on the similarity of the Hebrew words for “light” (*or*) and “ark” (*aron*).

11. The Ark was fashioned of gold and wood. Gold is beautiful, durable, and precious, symbolizing the enduring value and beauty of

make upon it a gold molding round about.
 12Cast four gold rings for it, to be attached to its four feet, two rings on one of its side walls and two on the other. 13Make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold; 14then insert the poles into the rings on the side walls of the ark, for carrying the ark. 15The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark: they shall not be removed from it. 16And deposit in the Ark [the tablets of] the Pact which I will give you.

17You shall make a cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. 18Make two cherubim of gold—make them of hammered work—at the two ends of the cover.

וּמְחוּץ תְּצַפֵּנוּ וְעָשִׂיתָ עָלָיו זָרָהב סָבִיב :
 12 וַיִּצְקֶתָ לּוֹ אַרְבַּע טַבְּעוֹת זָהָב וְנָתַתָּה
 עַל אַרְבַּע פְּעֻמָּתָיו וּשְׁתֵּי טַבְּעוֹת עַל-צִלְעוֹ
 הָאֶחָת וּשְׁתֵּי טַבְּעוֹת עַל-צִלְעוֹ הַשְּׁנִית :
 13 וְעָשִׂיתָ בְּדֵי עֵצֵי שִׁטִּים וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתָם
 זָהָב : 14 וְהִבַּאתָ אֶת-הַבַּדִּים בְּטַבְּעוֹת עַל
 צִלְעוֹת הָאָרֶן לְשֵׂאת אֶת-הָאָרֶן בָּהֶם :
 15 בְּטַבְּעוֹת הָאָרֶן יִהְיוּ הַבַּדִּים לֹא יִסְרוּ
 מִמֶּנּוּ : 16 וְנָתַתְּ אֶל-הָאָרֶן אֶת הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר
 אָתַן אֲלֶיךָ :
 17 וְעָשִׂיתָ כִּפְרֹת זָהָב טְהוֹר אֲמֹתִים וְחֻצֵי
 אַרְכָּה וְאֹמָה וְחֻצֵי רַחְבָּה : 18 וְעָשִׂיתָ
 שְׁנַיִם כְּרֻבִים זָהָב מְקֻשָּׁה תַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם

jacket; the other gold chest was fitted inside the wooden chest as a lining. Another tradition has the wooden chest simply overlaid with gold inside and out.

pure gold Such gold has undergone many steps in the refining process, which frees it of all impurities so that it becomes of the highest grade.

molding The top of the chest is to be rimmed by a gold band that slightly overlaps its perimeter.

12–15. The Ark is to be transported in the wilderness from station to station by means of gold-plated wooden poles inserted through gold rings attached to its sides.

16. [the tablets of] the Pact The function of the Ark is to house the stone tablets of the Decalogue.

The practice of depositing legal documents in a sacred place was widespread in the ancient Near East. It heightened the importance of the docu-

ment and delivered the message that the deity constantly guarded it and was witnessing its implementation.

THE KAPPORET AND THE CHERUBIM (vv. 17–22)

A solid slab of pure gold is to be placed above the Ark, which was open at the top. The dimensions of the slab correspond exactly to those of the Ark. This object is called *kapporet* in Hebrew. At either end of the *kapporet* a cherub—a creature with human, animal, and birdlike features—was hammered out. The two cherubim faced each other. Their outstretched wings were turned upward, sheltering the main body of the lid and the Ark below it and forming a throne for God when He descends to earth. The voice of God was thought to issue from the space above the lid and between the two cherubim.

the commandments that would be housed in the Ark. Wood is alive and can grow (even as the Torah is called “a tree of life”), symbolizing the importance of the contents of God’s Revelation, which continues to grow with the times.

pure gold . . . inside and out Even if no mortal ever sees the inside of the Ark, it must nevertheless be pure. “Any scholar who is not the same kind of person in private as in public is not a true scholar” (BT Yoma 72b).

15. The poles were never removed from the Ark, perhaps to make sure that the Ark was not touched needlessly or inadvertently. The Ark, the focus of holiness, simultaneously

draws the worshiper to it and inspires fear and awe, keeping one at a distance. The Midrash notes that the *kohanim* (priests) may have thought that they were carrying the Ark, when in reality the Ark was carrying them. People do not sustain religion as much as religion sustains the people.

17. cover Hebrew: *kapporet*. The same root כפר is believed to be the source of the term *Yom Kippur*. The Ark will function to “cover” Israel’s sins. The cover is made of gold to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf, reminding us that gold can be used as an idol or as an instrument of holiness (JT Shek. 1:1).

¹⁹Make one cherub at one end and the other cherub at the other end; of one piece with the cover shall you make the cherubim at its two ends. ²⁰The cherubim shall have their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings. They shall confront each other, the faces of the cherubim being turned toward the cover. ²¹Place the cover on top of the Ark, after depositing inside the Ark the Pact that I will give you. ²²There I will meet with you, and I will impart to you—from above the cover, from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the Pact—all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people.

²³You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. ²⁴Overlay it with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it. ²⁵Make a rim of a hand's breadth around it, and make a gold molding for its rim round about. ²⁶Make four gold rings for it, and attach the rings to the four

מִשְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַכַּפֹּרֶת: ¹⁹וַעֲשֵׂה כְרוּב אֶחָד מְקַצֵּה מְזֵה וּכְרוּב־אֶחָד מְקַצֵּה מְזֵה מִן־הַכַּפֹּרֶת תַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הַכְּרוּבִים עַל־שְׁנֵי קְצוֹתָיו: ²⁰וְהָיוּ הַכְּרוּבִים פְּרָשֵׁי כַנְּפִים לְמַעַל סַכְכִּים בְּכַנְפֵיהֶם עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת וּפְנֵיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל־אָחִיו אֶל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת יִהְיוּ פְּנֵי הַכְּרוּבִים: ²¹וְנָתַתָּ אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת עַל־הָאָרֶן מִלְּמַעַל וְאֶל־הָאָרֶן תִּתֵּן אֶת־הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ: ²²וְנוֹעַדְתִּי לָךְ שָׁם וְדִבַּרְתִּי אִתְּךָ מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרוּבִים אֲשֶׁר עַל־אָרֶן הָעֵדוּת אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה אוֹתְךָ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: פ

וְעָשִׂיתָ שְׁלֶחַן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אֲמַתִּים אַרְבֹּו וְאֲמָה רַחְבּוֹ וְאֲמָה וְחֻצֵי קִמְתּוֹ: ²⁴וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר וְעָשִׂיתָ לוֹ זָר זָהָב סָבִיב: ²⁵וְעָשִׂיתָ לוֹ מִסְגֶּרֶת טַפַּח סָבִיב וְעָשִׂיתָ זָר־זָהָב לְמִסְגֶּרֶתוֹ סָבִיב: ²⁶וְעָשִׂיתָ לוֹ אַרְבַּע טַבְּעוֹת זָהָב וְנָתַתָּ אֶת־הַטַּבְּעוֹת עַל אַרְבַּע הַפְּאֵת אֲשֶׁר לְאַרְבַּע רַגְלָיו:

22. The ornamented footstool (here, the ark), like the throne (here, the wings of the cherubim), was a sign of power in the ancient Near East. In this verse, the imagery of the footstool and the throne evoke the conception of God as King who issues His royal decrees to the people Israel through Moses.

THE TABLE AND ITS APPURTENANCES (vv. 23–30)

Specialized furniture and utensils are to be housed

in the Holy Place, the second sacred zone of the tabernacle.

The table is presented first, because in holiness it is second only to the ark. Made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold, the table is supported by four wooden legs to which golden rings are attached. Poles are inserted into these rings when the table is to be transported. Its main function was to accommodate the bread of display (v. 30), and its proper location was on the north side of the Holy Place in the tabernacle.

20. The cherubim shall have their wings spread out The cherubim “confront” one another, even as a religious person must always be connected to other people and may never turn away from them to be concerned only with God.

23. The table and the *m'norah* can be considered to symbolize the two halves of a human being, the physical-material half and the spiritual-intellectual half. The bread on the table represents a person's physical needs, and

the *m'norah* represents the light of learning and conscience. The *m'norah* is placed facing the table so that when we go forth to “earn our bread” the light of the *m'norah* will help us know the proper way to do it.

24. pure gold This refers not to the quality of the gold but to the manner of its being acquired. Gold can be sanctified or it can be contaminated, depending on the way in which it is earned and the way in which it is used.

corners at its four legs.²⁷The rings shall be next to the rim, as holders for poles to carry the table.²⁸Make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold; by these the table shall be carried.²⁹Make its bowls, ladles, jars and jugs with which to offer libations; make them of pure gold.³⁰And on the table you shall set the bread of display, to be before Me always.

³¹You shall make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its base and its shaft, its cups, calyces, and petals shall be of one piece.³²Six branches shall

לְעֵמֶת הַמִּסְגֶּרֶת תִּהְיֶינָה הַטְּבָעֹת
לְבָתַיִם לְבָדִים לְשֵׂאת אֶת־הַשְּׁלֶחָן:²⁷
וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַבָּדִים עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים וְצָפִיתָ²⁸
אֹתָם זָהָב וְנִשְׂאֲבָם אֶת־הַשְּׁלֶחָן:
וְעָשִׂיתָ קְעֵרֹתָיו וְכַפְתָּיו וְקִשּׁוֹתָיו²⁹
וּמִנְקִיתָיו אֲשֶׁר יִסֹּף בָּהֶן זָהָב טָהוֹר
תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם:³⁰ וְנָתַתָּ עַל־הַשְּׁלֶחָן לֶחֶם
פָּנִים לְפָנַי תָּמִיד: פ
וְעָשִׂיתָ מִנְרֵת זָהָב טָהוֹר מִקְשָׁה תַּעֲשֶׂה³¹
הַמִּנְרֵה יִרְכָּה וְקִנְיָה גְבִיעֵיהָ כְּפִתְרֶיהָ

29. Four utensils were displayed on the table. These are referred to in other texts as “service vessels” and as “sacred utensils.”

bowls The Talmud understood these to be the molds in which the loaves of bread were placed after baking so that they would retain their shape.

ladles These palm-shaped vessels contained the frankincense that was placed on the table of the bread of display and burned when the loaves were removed each *Shabbat*.

jars In the Talmud they are defined as “props” for the loaves of bread on display. One medieval commentator thought they might be containers for water used in kneading the dough.

jugs Hebrew: *m'nakkiyyot*; literally, “cleansers.” One of the traditional commentators took them to be utensils for clearing ashes from the oven and for cleaning the table.

30. bread of display Referred to as such because it was displayed in a special way. According to the Talmud, 12 of these flat, oblong loaves were set out on the table in two equal rows (see Lev. 24:6). They were undisturbed for the entire week until *Shabbat*, when they were replaced by freshly baked loaves. The old loaves were eaten by the priests inside the sacred precincts.

THE M'NORAH (vv. 31–40)

The second sacred item of furniture in the Holy Place was the lampstand, the seven-branched *m'norah*, positioned on the south side of the tabernacle opposite the table. We are not told whether the lamps on the six side branches were

level with the lamp of the central shaft; and there is no information about the material from which the lamps were to be made. The dimensions of the lampstand also are not given. The primary function of the *m'norah* was to illuminate the area around it at nighttime. For some early commentators the *m'norah* symbolized the tree of life. Aaron and his sons had the exclusive responsibility for lighting and tending the lamps.

31. a lampstand The biblical word *m'norah* is sometimes erroneously translated “candlestick” or “candelabrum.” There were no candles, however, until the Roman period.

base Hebrew: *yarekh*; literally, “loins, thigh.” Ancient Near Eastern lampstands featured a gradual increase in width toward the bottom. Probably this type of flared base is referred to here.

shaft Hebrew: *kaneh*, literally, “cane, reed”; refers to the six branches of the lampstand.

cups Hebrew: *g'vi-a*; refers to a goblet, a bulbous-shaped receptacle.

calyces Hebrew: *kaftor*; an architectural term that designates the capital of a column. Such capitals were ornamented with a leaflike motif.

petals The Hebrew word *perah*, usually meaning “flower,” is here rendered “lily” in the Greek and Latin translations of the Torah. In the ancient world, the water lily (the lotus blossom) symbolized newborn life and was highly popular as a floral decoration on columns.

of one piece All these elements, together with the central shaft, are to be made from a single block of gold, not assembled from separate parts.

37. The seven lamps of the *m'norah* symbolize the seven days of Creation (PR 8), honoring God who created the world, and highlighting the tabernacle as a world of its own. Although this was the lamp that burned mi-

raculously in the story of *Hanukkah*, a *Hanukkah m'norah* has eight branches rather than seven, to commemorate the eight days of the *Hanukkah* miracle.

issue from its sides; three branches from one side of the lampstand and three branches from the other side of the lampstand. ³³On one branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals, and on the next branch there shall be three cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals; so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand. ³⁴And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond-blossoms, each with calyx and petals: ^{35a} a calyx, of one piece with it, under a pair of branches; and a calyx, of one piece with it, under the second pair of branches, and a calyx, of one piece with it, under the last pair of branches; so for all six branches issuing from the lampstand. ³⁶Their calyxes and their stems shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single hammered piece of pure gold. ³⁷Make its seven lamps—the lamps shall be so mounted as to give the light on its front side—³⁸and its tongs and fire pans of pure gold. ³⁹It shall be made, with all these furnishings, out of a talent of pure gold. ⁴⁰Note well, and follow the patterns for them that are being shown you on the mountain.

וּפְרָחֶיהָ מִמְּנָה יִהְיוּ: ³² וְשֵׁשׁ קָנִים יִצְאִים מִצְדֵּיהָ שְׁלֹשָׁה | קָנֵי מְנֹרָה מִצְדָּה אֶחָד וְשֵׁשׁ קָנֵי מְנֹרָה מִצְדָּה הַשְּׁנִי: ³³ שְׁלֹשָׁה גְבַעִים מְשֻׁקָּדִים בְּקִנְיָה אֶחָד כְּפֶתֶר וּפָרַח וְשֵׁשׁ גְבַעִים מְשֻׁקָּדִים בְּקִנְיָה אֶחָד כְּפֶתֶר וּפָרַח פֶּן לְשֵׁשׁ הַקָּנִים הַיִּצְאִים מִן־הַמְּנֹרָה: ³⁴ וּבְמְנֹרָה אַרְבַּעַה גְבַעִים מְשֻׁקָּדִים כְּפֶתֶרֶיהָ וּפְרָחֶיהָ: ³⁵ וְכִפְתָּר תַּחַת שְׁנֵי הַקָּנִים מִמְּנָה וְכִפְתָּר תַּחַת שְׁנֵי הַקָּנִים מִמְּנָה וְכִפְתָּר תַּחַת־שְׁנֵי הַקָּנִים מִמְּנָה לְשֵׁשׁ הַקָּנִים הַיִּצְאִים מִן־הַמְּנֹרָה: ³⁶ כְּפֶתֶרֶיהֶם וּקְנָתָם מִמְּנָה יִהְיוּ כְּלֵה מְקֻשָּׁה אַחַת זָהָב טָהוֹר: ³⁷ וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־נֹרְתֶיהָ שְׁבָעָה וְהִעֵלָה אֶת־נֹרְתֶיהָ וְהָאִיר עַל־עֵבֶר פְּנִיָּה: ³⁸ וּמִלְקַחֶיהָ וּמִחֶתְתֶיהָ זָהָב טָהוֹר: ³⁹ כֶּכֶר זָהָב טָהוֹר יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ אֵת כָּל־הַפְּלִים הָאֵלֶּה: ⁴⁰ וְרָאָה וְעָשָׂה בְּתַבְנִיתָם אֲשֶׁר־אַתָּה מְרַאֶה בְּהָר: ס

26 As for the Tabernacle, make it of ten strips of cloth; make these of fine twisted linen,

כו וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן תַּעֲשֶׂה עֶשֶׂר יְרִיעֹת שֵׁשׁ מְשֻׁזָּר וְתַכְלֵת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתַלְעַת שְׁנֵי שְׁלִישִׁי

35. lampstand The central shaft. Its ornamentation is to be located just beneath the points from which the six side branches emerge.

37. lamps The containers for the wick and oil.

on its front side The lamps are to be arranged in such a way that the light shines toward the facing table.

38. tongs and fire pans These nouns are objects of the verb “make” in verse 37. The tongs were used to remove the burned wicks; the fire pans, to receive them.

39. a talent Hebrew: *kikkar*. This is the largest unit of weight mentioned in the Bible, equivalent to 3000 shekels (see 38:24).

THE TABERNACLE COVERINGS (26:1–14)

The text turns to the four layers of coverings that serve as the tabernacle roof.

THE LOWEST LAYER (vv. 1–6)

The lowest layer is made of 10 multicolored sheets of fine linen decorated with the cherubim motif. They are sewn into paired sets of 5, i.e., two long sheets. A total of 50 blue loops are fixed along one edge of each sheet. The two sets are then fastened together by gold clasps inserted into the loops.

1. Tabernacle Here, the text refers specifically to the two sacred zones, the Holy of Holies

of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, with a design of cherubim worked into them. ²The length of each cloth shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each cloth shall be four cubits, all the cloths to have the same measurements. ³Five of the cloths shall be joined to one another, and the other five cloths shall be joined to one another. ⁴Make loops of blue wool on the edge of the outermost cloth of the one set; and do likewise on the edge of the outermost cloth of the other set: ⁵make fifty loops on the one cloth, and fifty loops on the edge of the end cloth of the other set, the loops to be opposite one another. ⁶And make fifty gold clasps, and couple the cloths to one another with the clasps, so that the Tabernacle becomes one whole.

⁷You shall then make cloths of goats' hair for a tent over the Tabernacle; make the cloths eleven in number. ⁸The length of each cloth

כָּרָבִים מַעֲשֵׂה חֹשֶׁב תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם: ² אַרְבָּה | הִירִיעָה הָאֶחָת שְׁמֹנֶה וְעֶשְׂרִים בְּאֹמֶה וְרֹחַב אַרְבַּע בְּאֹמֶה הִירִיעָה הָאֶחָת מֵדָה אֶחָת לְכָל־הִירִיעוֹת: ³ חֲמֵשׁ הִירִיעוֹת תַּהְיִינָן חִבְרוֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֶחָתָהּ: וְחֲמֵשׁ יִרְיעוֹת חִבְרוֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֶחָתָהּ: ⁴ וְעָשִׂיתָ לְלֹאֵת תְּכָלֵת עַל שְׁפַת הִירִיעָה הָאֶחָת מְקַצָּה בַחִבְרוֹת וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּשְׁפַת הִירִיעָה הַקִּיצוֹנָה בַּמַּחְבֵּרֶת הַשְּׁנִיָּת: ⁵ חֲמֵשִׁים לְלֹאֵת תַּעֲשֶׂה בִּירִיעָה הָאֶחָת וְחֲמֵשִׁים לְלֹאֵת תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּקֶצֶה הִירִיעָה אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחְבֵּרֶת הַשְּׁנִיָּת מְקַבִּילַת הַלְּלֹאֵת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֶחָתָהּ: ⁶ וְעָשִׂיתָ חֲמֵשִׁים קְרָסִי זָהָב וְחִבְרוֹת אֶת־הִירִיעוֹת אִשָּׁה אֶל־אֶחָתָהּ בְּקְרָסִים וְהָיָה הַמְּשָׁפָן אֶחָד: ⁷ וְעָשִׂיתָ יִרְיעוֹת עֲזִים לְאֹהֶל עַל־הַמְּשָׁפָן עֲשֵׂת־עֶשְׂרֵה יִרְיעוֹת תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם: ⁸ אַרְבָּה | הִירִיעָה הָאֶחָת שְׁלֹשִׁים בְּאֹמֶה

and the Holy Place, both of which were covered by the lowest of the tabernacle's covers.

strips of cloth The Hebrew word *y'ri-ab* always pertains to the fabrics of which tents are made.

twisted The lowest layer is to be made of a fine grade of linen woven of twisted yarns.

a design of cherubim Hebrew: *k'ruvim ma-asei hoshev*; literally, "cherubs, the work of a thinker/designer," a creative and imaginative artist. A highly specialized technique of weaving apparently is referred to here, different from that mentioned later in verse 36 and 28:32.

3. joined Stitched together with needle and thread.

6. clasps Probably S-shaped, the clasps are to be inserted through the two parallel sets of loops.

one whole The 10 separate fabrics covering the section of the tabernacle that contains the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place become a single entity.

THE SECOND LAYER (vv. 7-13)

A coarser covering, made of 11 strips of goats' hair, was to be laid above the linen fabric. A unit of 5 strips and one of 6 strips were to be stitched together and then secured by loops and clasps. The text does not specify the color of the loops, which suggests that they were not dyed. The clasps were made of bronze. The long fabric was to be spread lengthwise over the entire area of the tabernacle, starting from the eastern entrance and extending toward the rear. The outermost strip, called "the sixth," which began at the entrance, was to be doubled over. On the north and south sides, the coverings of goats' hair just reached the ground. On the west side, the fabric would trail along the ground.

7. goats' hair See Comment to 25:4.

for a tent As a protective shield over the ornamented linen cover.

eleven One strip more than the number of linen cloths.

whole The tabernacle is symbolic of the Israelites. They too are composed of many parts, but they must form one harmonious whole.

CHAPTER 26

6. so that the Tabernacle becomes one

shall be thirty cubits, and the width of each cloth shall be four cubits, the eleven cloths to have the same measurements. ⁹Join five of the cloths by themselves, and the other six cloths by themselves; and fold over the sixth cloth at the front of the tent. ¹⁰Make fifty loops on the edge of the outermost cloth of the one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the cloth of the other set. ¹¹Make fifty copper clasps, and fit the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together so that it becomes one whole. ¹²As for the overlapping excess of the cloths of the tent, the extra half-cloth shall overlap the back of the Tabernacle, ¹³while the extra cubit at either end of each length of tent cloth shall hang down to the bottom of the two sides of the Tabernacle and cover it. ¹⁴And make for the tent a covering of tanned ram skins, and a covering of dolphin skins above.

¹⁵You shall make the planks for the Tabernacle of acacia wood, upright. ¹⁶The length of each plank shall be ten cubits and the width of each plank a cubit and a half. ¹⁷Each plank shall

וְרָחֵב אַרְבַּע בְּאַמָּה הִירִיעָה הָאֶחָת מִדָּה אֶחָת לְעֶשְׂתֵי עֶשְׂרֵה יְרִיעֹת: ⁹ וְחִבְרָתָּ אֶת־חֲמֵשׁ הִירִיעֹת לְבָד וְאֶת־שֵׁשׁ הִירִיעֹת לְבָד וְכִפַּלְתָּ אֶת־הִירִיעָה הַשְּׁשִׁית אֶל־מוֹל פְּנֵי הָאֹהֶל: ¹⁰ וְעָשִׂיתָ חֲמִשִּׁים לְלֹאֹת עַל שַׁפַּת הִירִיעָה הָאֶחָת הַקִּיצָנָה בַּחֲבֵרֶת וְחֲמִשִּׁים לְלֹאֹת עַל שַׁפַּת הִירִיעָה הַחֲבֵרֶת הַשְּׁנִית: ¹¹ וְעָשִׂיתָ קְרָסֵי נְחֹשֶׁת חֲמִשִּׁים וְהִבַּאתָ אֶת־הַקְּרָסִים בְּלֹלֹאֹת וְחִבְרָתָּ אֶת־הָאֹהֶל וְהָיָה אֶחָד: ¹² וְסָרַח הָעֲדוּף בִּירִיעֹת הָאֹהֶל חֲצֵי הִירִיעָה הָעֲדוּפָת תִּסְרַח עַל אַחֲרֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן: ¹³ וְהָאֹמָה מִזֶּה וְהָאֹמָה מִזֶּה יִהְיֶה סָרוּחַ עַל־צַדֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן מִזֶּה וּמִזֶּה לְכַסְתּוֹ: ¹⁴ וְעָשִׂיתָ מְכֹסֶה לְאֹהֶל עֶרְת אֵילִם מְאֻדָּמִים וּמְכֹסֶה עֶרְת תְּחָשִׁים מְלֻמְעָה: ^פ

¹⁵ וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים לַמִּשְׁכָּן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים עֹמְדִים: ¹⁶ עֶשְׂרֵה אַמּוֹת אָרְךָ הַקְּרֶשׁ וְאֹמָה וְחֲצֵי הָאֹמָה רָחֵב הַקְּרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד: ¹⁷ שְׁתֵּי יָדוֹת לְקְרֶשׁ הָאֶחָד מִשְׁלֹבֵת אִשָּׁה

11. copper See Comment to 25:3.

12. tent The covering.

THE THIRD AND FOURTH LAYERS (v. 14)

The text does not give the measurements of the two uppermost leather coverings.

14. dolphin skins See Comment to 25:5.

THE WOODEN STRUCTURE (vv. 15–30)

The instructions now outline the structure that is to hold the cloths. Three walls are to be con-

structed of timber planks or frames cut from acacia trees. The northern and southern walls are made up of 20 such planks or frames, for a total of 40; the western wall requires 8; the eastern side has none. The tabernacle was exactly half the size of Solomon's Temple in length and width, and one-third its height, according to the dimensions given in 1 Kings 6:2.

15. acacia See Comment to 25:5.

upright This refers to the placement of the planks.

15. Why was the acacia tree chosen to be the exclusive source of wood for the Ark and for the tabernacle? The Midrash suggests that it was chosen because it is not a fruit-bearing tree. God did not want to destroy the future fruit harvests of a tree even to build the Ark.

Where did these acacia trees come from?

They are not native to the Sinai wilderness. Legend has it that the patriarch Jacob planted them on his way to Egypt, foreseeing that one day his grandchildren would need them. He did something of no immediate use to himself, for the benefit of future generations (Tanḥ.).

have two tenons, parallel to each other; do the same with all the planks of the Tabernacle. ¹⁸Of the planks of the Tabernacle, make twenty planks on the south side; ¹⁹making forty silver sockets under the twenty planks, two sockets under the one plank for its two tenons and two sockets under each following plank for its two tenons; ²⁰and for the other side wall of the Tabernacle, on the north side, twenty planks, ²¹with their forty silver sockets, two sockets under the one plank and two sockets under each following plank. ²²And for the rear of the Tabernacle, to the west, make six planks; ²³and make two planks for the corners of the Tabernacle at the rear. ²⁴They shall match at the bottom, and terminate alike at the top inside one ring; thus shall it be with both of them: they shall form the two corners. ²⁵Thus there shall be eight planks with their sockets of silver: sixteen sockets, two sockets under the first plank, and two sockets under each of the other planks.

²⁶You shall make bars of acacia wood: five for the planks of the one side wall of the Tabernacle, ²⁷five bars for the planks of the other side wall of the Tabernacle, and five bars for the planks of the wall of the Tabernacle at the rear to the west. ²⁸The center bar halfway up the planks shall run from end to end. ²⁹Overlay the planks with gold, and make their rings of gold, as holders for the bars; and overlay the bars with gold. ³⁰Then set up the Tabernacle according

אל־אַחַתָּהּ בְּנֵי תַעֲשֶׂה לְכָל קַרְשֵׁי הַמִּשְׁכָּן: ¹⁸ וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַקַּרְשִׁים לְמִשְׁכָּן עֶשְׂרִים קָרֵשׁ לַפֶּאֶת נִגְבָּה תִּימְנָה: ¹⁹ וְאַרְבָּעִים אֲדָנֵי־כֶסֶף תַּחַת עֶשְׂרִים הַקָּרֵשׁ שְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת־הַקָּרֵשׁ הָאֶחָד לְשֵׁתֵי יָדָתָיו וּשְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת־הַקָּרֵשׁ הָאֶחָד לְשֵׁתֵי יָדָתָיו: ²⁰ וּלְצִלְעַת הַמִּשְׁכָּן הַשְּׁנִית לַפֶּאֶת צָפוֹן עֶשְׂרִים קָרֵשׁ: ²¹ וְאַרְבָּעִים אֲדָנֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף שְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת הַקָּרֵשׁ הָאֶחָד וּשְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת הַקָּרֵשׁ הָאֶחָד: ²² וְלִירְכָתַי הַמִּשְׁכָּן יָמָה תַעֲשֶׂה שָׁשָׁה קַרְשִׁים: ²³ וּשְׁנֵי קַרְשִׁים תַעֲשֶׂה לְמַקְצַעַת הַמִּשְׁכָּן בִּירְכָתָיִם: ²⁴ וַיְהִיו תְּאֵמִים מִלְמַטָּה וַיַּחֲדוּ יֵהָיו תְּמִים עַל־רֵאשׁוֹ אֶל־הַטְּבַעַת הָאֶחָת בֵּן יֵהִי לְשֵׁנֵיהֶם לְשְׁנֵי הַמַּקְצַעַת יֵהִיו: ²⁵ וְהָיו שְׁמֹנֶה קַרְשִׁים וְאֲדָנֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף שָׁשָׁה עֶשֶׂר אֲדָנִים שְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת הַקָּרֵשׁ הָאֶחָד וּשְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת הַקָּרֵשׁ הָאֶחָד:

²⁶ וְעָשִׂיתָ בְּרִיחִם עֲצֵי שֹׁטִים חֲמֵשָׁה לְקַרְשֵׁי צִלְע־הַמִּשְׁכָּן הָאֶחָד: ²⁷ וְחֲמֵשָׁה בְּרִיחִם לְקַרְשֵׁי צִלְע־הַמִּשְׁכָּן הַשְּׁנִית וְחֲמֵשָׁה בְּרִיחִם לְקַרְשֵׁי צִלְעַת הַמִּשְׁכָּן לִירְכָתָיִם יָמָה: ²⁸ וְהַבְּרִיחַ הַתִּיכָן בְּתוֹךְ הַקַּרְשִׁים מִבְּרַח מִן־הַקְּצָה אֶל־הַקְּצָה: ²⁹ וְאֶת־הַקַּרְשִׁים תְּצַפֶּה זָהָב וְאֶת־טְבַעְתֵּיהֶם תַעֲשֶׂה זָהָב בְּתִים לְבְּרִיחִם וְצַפִּיתָ אֶת־הַבְּרִיחִם זָהָב: ³⁰ וְהִקְמַתָּ

22. to the west Hebrew: *yammah*; literally, “seaward,” i.e., toward the Mediterranean.

23. corners The Hebrew word *m'kutz-ot* (*miktzo-ot* in v. 24 and elsewhere) is an architectural term for some kind of special corner structure. Here it seems to involve two extra supports, one at each corner of the western wall.

24. Apparently, according to this verse, the corner buttresses are to be perfectly aligned and secured at both top and bottom.

26. bars A crossbar, usually one that secures doors and gates. The precise location and arrangement of the bars here are uncertain.

30. This refers back to 25:9.

to the manner of it that you were shown on the mountain.

³¹You shall make a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen; it shall have a design of cherubim worked into it. ³²Hang it upon four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and having hooks of gold, [set] in four sockets of silver. ³³Hang the curtain under the clasps, and carry the Ark of the Pact there, behind the curtain, so that the curtain shall serve you as a partition between the Holy and the Holy of Holies. ³⁴Place the cover upon the Ark of the Pact in the Holy of Holies. ³⁵Place the table outside the curtain, and the lampstand by the south wall of the Tabernacle opposite the table, which is to be placed by the north wall.

³⁶You shall make a screen for the entrance of the Tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, done in embroidery. ³⁷Make five posts of acacia wood for the screen and overlay them with gold—their hooks being of gold—and cast for them five sockets of copper.

THE INNER CURTAIN (*PAROKHET*)
(vv. 31–35)

The tabernacle is to be partitioned into two unequal sections by a curtain, or a veil (Hebrew: *parokhet*). The inner section will form a perfect cube measuring 10 cubits (15 ft.; 4.6 m.) on each side. This is the Holy of Holies, which will contain the ark and the *kapporet*, as prescribed in 25:17. The outer section will measure 10 cubits in width, 20 cubits in length, and 10 cubits in height (15 by 30 by 15 ft.). It is called the “Holy Place” and will receive the table, the *m'norah*, and the altar of incense. The *parokhet* is made from the same fabric and designed with the same colors as the lowest coverings. It, too, is adorned with figures of cherubim. Its size is not given.

33. Ramban notes that the sequence presented here is not the same as that of the actual

אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן בְּמִשְׁפָּטוֹ אֲשֶׁר הִרְאִיתָ
בְּהַר: ס

חמישי ³¹ וְעָשִׂיתָ פָּרֹכֶת תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מְשׂוּר מַעֲשֵׂה חֹשֶׁב יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָהּ כְּרֻבִים: ³² וְנָתַתָּה אֹתָהּ עַל־אַרְבָּעָה עַמּוּדֵי שֹׁטִים מְצֻפִּים זָהָב וְוִיָּהֶם זָהָב עַל־אַרְבָּעָה אֲדָנֵי־כֶסֶף: ³³ וְנָתַתָּה אֶת־הַפָּרֹכֶת תַּחַת הַקְּרָסִים וְהִבַּאתָ שָׁמָּה מִבֵּית לַפָּרֹכֶת אֶת אַרְוֹן הָעֵדוּת וְהַבְדִּילָהּ הַפָּרֹכֶת לָכֶם בֵּין הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבֵין קֹדֶשׁ הַקֹּדָשִׁים: ³⁴ וְנָתַתָּ אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת עַל אַרְוֹן הָעֵדוּת בְּקֹדֶשׁ הַקֹּדָשִׁים: ³⁵ וְשִׁמַּתָּ אֶת־הַשְּׁלֶחָן מִחוּץ לַפָּרֹכֶת וְאֶת־הַמְּנֹרָה נֹכַח הַשְּׁלֶחָן עַל צִלְע הַמִּשְׁכָּן תִּימֵנָה וְהַשְּׁלֶחָן תִּתֵּן עַל־צִלְע צָפוֹן:

³⁶ וְעָשִׂיתָ מָסָךְ לַפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל תְּכֵלֶת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מְשׂוּר מַעֲשֵׂה רֻקְם: ³⁷ וְעָשִׂיתָ לַמָּסָךְ חֲמֵשֶׁה עַמּוּדֵי שֹׁטִים וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתָם זָהָב וְוִיָּהֶם זָהָב וְיִצְקֶתָ לָהֶם חֲמֵשֶׁה אֲדָנֵי נְחֹשֶׁת: ס

construction and assembly described in 40:3, where we are told the ark was put in place first and the curtain later.

THE OUTER CURTAIN (vv. 36–37)

A second screen separated the entrance of the Holy Place on the eastern side from the outer court. It was made of the same multicolored fabric as the *parokhet* but was not decorated with cherubs. Other differences: It was embroidered and it rested on five pillars instead of four; its pillars fitted into bronze rather than silver sockets.

36. done in embroidery The Hebrew phrase *ma-asei rokem* refers to another type of specialized weaving, one that required less skill than that needed for the coverings of the tabernacle and the *parokhet*.

37. copper Better: bronze. See Comment to 25:3.

27 You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide—the altar is to be square—and three cubits high. ²Make its horns on the four corners, the horns to be of one piece with it; and overlay it with copper. ³Make the pails for removing its ashes, as well as its scrapers, basins, flesh hooks, and fire pans—make all its utensils of copper. ⁴Make for it a grating of meshwork in copper; and on the mesh make four copper rings at its four corners. ⁵Set the mesh below, under the ledge of the altar, so that it extends to the middle of the altar. ⁶And make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with copper. ⁷The poles shall be inserted into the rings, so that the poles remain on the two sides of the altar when it is car-

כז וְעָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עֲצֵי שֵׁטִים
 חָמֵשׁ אַמּוֹת אָרְזָה וְחָמֵשׁ אַמּוֹת רֹחַב רְבֹעַ
 יִהְיֶה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְשִׁלְשׁ אַמּוֹת קָמְתוֹ׃
² וְעָשִׂיתָ קַרְנֹתָיו עַל אַרְבַּע פְּנֵיתָיו מִמֶּנּוּ
 תִּהְיֶינָה קַרְנֹתָיו וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ נְחֹשֶׁת׃
³ וְעָשִׂיתָ סִירְתָיו לְדִשְׁנוֹ וְיַעֲיֹ וּמִזְרְקָתָיו
 וּמִזְלָגָתָיו וּמַחְתֵּיָם לְכָל־כְּלֵיו תַּעֲשֶׂה
 נְחֹשֶׁת׃ ⁴ וְעָשִׂיתָ לוֹ מִכְבָּר מֵעֵשֶׂה רֶשֶׁת
 נְחֹשֶׁת וְעָשִׂיתָ עַל־הָרֶשֶׁת אַרְבַּע טַבַּעֹת
 נְחֹשֶׁת עַל אַרְבַּע קְצוֹתָיו׃ ⁵ וְנָתַתָּה אֹתָהּ
 תַּחַת כַּרְכַּב הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִלְמַטָּה וְהִיתָה
 הָרֶשֶׁת עַד חֲצֵי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ׃ ⁶ וְעָשִׂיתָ בְּדִים
 לַמִּזְבֵּחַ בְּדֵי עֲצֵי שֵׁטִים וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתָם
 נְחֹשֶׁת׃ ⁷ וְהוֹבֵאתָ אֶת־בְּדָיו בַּטַּבַּעֹת וְהָיוּ
 הַבְּדִים עַל־שְׁתֵּי צְלָעֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ בְּשָׂאת

THE OUTER ALTAR OF SACRIFICES
 AND ITS ACCESSORIES (27:1–8)

The text moves from the Holy Place to the courtyard of the tabernacle, beginning with the most important item there, the altar of burnt offering. The details of its construction are quite complicated and imperfectly understood, and its precise location is not given. It was carried by means of bronzed poles inserted, when necessary, into rings affixed to its sides.

1. altar The patriarchs frequently built altars, and Moses built two of them. Because an altar was an indispensable part of worship and ritual, its presence in the tabernacle is taken for granted—hence, the use of the definite article. Stone altars with “horns” at the four corners have been discovered at several Israelite sites.

2. The horn-shaped projections at the upper corners were to be carved out of the wooden structure and then bronzed, to become integral parts of the altar. They were not to be made separately and then attached to it.

2–19. copper Better: bronze. See Comment to 25:3.

3. The text lists five accessories needed for the performance of the sacrificial rites. No quantity is given for any of them.

pails Hebrew: *sir*; usually refers to a large vessel with a wide mouth.

scrapers Hebrew: *ya-eh*; designates a kind of shovel with which the refuse on the altar is gathered up and placed in the pails for removal.

basins Hebrew: *mizrak*, from the stem *רק* (to sprinkle); refers to the vessel in which the blood of the sacrificial animal is collected for sprinkling on the altar. Blood, in the biblical view, constitutes the essence of life and, therefore, belongs only to God, the giver of all life. The act of sprinkling the blood on the altar or its base, a vital part of the sacrificial ritual, symbolizes its return to God.

flesh hooks Hebrew: *mizlagab*; an implement, probably a large, three-pronged fork, with which the flesh is turned over while it is being burnt on the altar.

4. grating A kind of sieve, placed beneath a ledge that runs all around the altar, perhaps to catch falling embers.

5. ledge According to some of the Sages, the ledge was a projection that served as a walkway for the priests officiating on the altar.

middle Depending on the category of sacrifice, the blood had to be sprinkled either above or below this line.

6–7. poles For carrying.

ried. ⁸Make it hollow, of boards. As you were shown on the mountain, so shall they be made.

⁹You shall make the enclosure of the Tabernacle:

On the south side, a hundred cubits of hangings of fine twisted linen for the length of the enclosure on that side—¹⁰with its twenty posts and their twenty sockets of copper, the hooks and bands of the posts to be of silver.

¹¹Again a hundred cubits of hangings for its length along the north side—with its twenty posts and their twenty sockets of copper, the hooks and bands of the posts to be of silver.

¹²For the width of the enclosure, on the west side, fifty cubits of hangings, with their ten posts and their ten sockets.

¹³For the width of the enclosure on the front, or east side, fifty cubits: ¹⁴fifteen cubits of hangings on the one flank, with their three posts and their three sockets; ¹⁵fifteen cubits of hangings on the other flank, with their three posts and their three sockets; ¹⁶and for the gate of the enclosure, a screen of twenty cubits, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, done in embroidery, with their four posts and their four sockets.

¹⁷All the posts round the enclosure shall be banded with silver and their hooks shall be of silver; their sockets shall be of copper.

¹⁸The length of the enclosure shall be a hundred cubits, and the width fifty throughout; and the height five cubits—[with hangings] of fine twisted linen. The sockets shall be of copper: ¹⁹all the utensils of the Tabernacle, for all its

אתו: ⁸נבוב לַחַת תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר הָרָאָה אֶתְךָ בְּהָר בֵּן יַעֲשֹׂ: ט

שביעי ⁹וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֶת חֲצֵר הַמִּשְׁכָּן

לְפָאֵת נִגְבֵי־תִימְנָה קְלָעִים לַחֲצֵר שֵׁשׁ מִשׁוֹר מֵאָה בְּאֵמָה אַרְבָּה לְפָאֵה הָאֲחֹת:

¹⁰וְעַמֻּדָיו עֶשְׂרִים וְאֲדָנֵיהֶם עֶשְׂרִים נְחֹשֶׁת וְנִי הָעַמֻּדִים וְחֻשְׁקֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף:

¹¹וְכֹן לְפָאֵת צְפוֹן בְּאֵרֶךְ קְלָעִים מֵאָה אַרְבָּה וְעַמֻּדוֹ וְעַמֻּדָיו עֶשְׂרִים וְאֲדָנֵיהֶם עֶשְׂרִים נְחֹשֶׁת וְנִי הָעַמֻּדִים וְחֻשְׁקֵיהֶם כֶּסֶף:

¹²וְרֹחַב הַחֲצֵר לְפָאֵת־יָם קְלָעִים חֲמִשִּׁים אֵמָה עַמֻּדֵיהֶם עֶשְׂרֵה וְאֲדָנֵיהֶם עֶשְׂרֵה:

¹³וְרֹחַב הַחֲצֵר לְפָאֵת קִדְמָה מִזְרָחָה חֲמִשִּׁים אֵמָה: ¹⁴וְחִמֵּשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה אֵמָה

קְלָעִים לְפָתֵף עַמֻּדֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה וְאֲדָנֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה: ¹⁵וּלְפָתֵף הַשְּׂנִית חִמֵּשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה

קְלָעִים עַמֻּדֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה וְאֲדָנֵיהֶם שְׁלֹשָׁה: ¹⁶וּלְשַׁעַר הַחֲצֵר מִסָּף | עֶשְׂרִים

אֵמָה תְּכַלֵּת וְאַרְגָּמָן וְתוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי וְשֵׁשׁ מִשׁוֹר מַעֲשֶׂה רֶקֶם עַמֻּדֵיהֶם אַרְבָּעָה וְאֲדָנֵיהֶם אַרְבָּעָה:

¹⁷כָּל־עַמֻּדֵי הַחֲצֵר סָבִיב מִחֻשְׁקִים כֶּסֶף וְוִיהֶם כֶּסֶף וְאֲדָנֵיהֶם נְחֹשֶׁת:

¹⁸אַרְבָּה הַחֲצֵר מֵאָה בְּאֵמָה וְרֹחַב | חֲמִשִּׁים בְּחֲמִשִּׁים וְקִמָּה חִמֵּשׁ אַמּוֹת

שֵׁשׁ מִשׁוֹר וְאֲדָנֵיהֶם נְחֹשֶׁת: ¹⁹לְכֹל כְּלֵי

THE ENCLOSURE (vv. 9–19)

As in all temples and sanctuaries, the sacred area of the tabernacle must be clearly separated from the profane space outside. The instructions now deal with the enclosure of the entire tabernacle compound, termed *hatzer* in Hebrew.

10. posts According to 38:17, the bronze posts had silver tops.

bands These are some type of connecting rods. The root of the word for “band” (*hashbuk*) means “to be attached to.”

13. on the front, or east side Hebrew: *kedmah mizrahah*; literally, “on the front toward the rising sun.”

A SUMMATION (vv. 18–19)

19. Tabernacle Here, the Hebrew *mishkan*

service, as well as all its pegs and all the pegs of the court, shall be of copper.

הַמִּשְׁכָּן בְּכֹל עֲבֹדָתוֹ וְכָל-יִתְדֵיָו וְכָל-
יִתְדֵי הַחֲצָר נְחֹשֶׁת: ט

means the entire tabernacle compound. In the tabernacle proper, the accessories of the Holy of Holies and of the Holy Place were made of gold, not bronze. The requirements for the Solomonic

Temple are found in 1 Kings 6–7. It should be noted that all of the specifications that the Torah prescribes in such detail were generally considered to be secret in other ancient Near Eastern sources.

and seizes him by his genitals, ¹²you shall cut off her hand; show no pity.

¹³You shall not have in your pouch alternate weights, larger and smaller. ¹⁴You shall not have in your house alternate measures, a larger and a smaller. ¹⁵You must have completely honest weights and completely honest measures, if you are to endure long on the soil that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁶For everyone who does those things, everyone who deals dishonestly, is abhorrent to the LORD your God.

¹⁷Remember what Amalek did to you on your

בְּמִבְשׁוֹי: ¹²וְקָצַצְתָּ אֶת־כַּפְּפָהּ לֹא תַחֲסֹס עֵינֶיךָ: ס

¹³לֹא־יִהְיֶה לְךָ בְּכִיסֶיךָ אֶבֶן וְאֶבֶן גְּדוֹלָה וְקִטְנָה: ס ¹⁴לֹא־יִהְיֶה לְךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ אֵיפָה וְאֵיפָה גְּדוֹלָה וְקִטְנָה: ¹⁵אֶבֶן שְׁלֵמָה וְצֶדֶק יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֵיפָה שְׁלֵמָה וְצֶדֶק יִהְיֶה לְךָ לְמַעַן יֵאָרִיכוּ יְמֵיךָ עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ: ¹⁶כִּי תוֹעֲבַת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּל־עֲשֵׂה אֵלָה כָּל־עֲשֵׂה עוֹל: פ

מִפְטִיר ¹⁷זָכוֹר אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֶק בְּדֶרֶךְ

IMPROPER INTERVENTION IN A FIGHT (vv. 11–12)

12. cut off her hand In the ancient Near East, it was common to inflict punishment on the part of the body with which an offense was committed. The reason for such a severe punishment is not clear. Some think it may be because of her injuring the man's genitals and threatening his ability to father children, as is stated explicitly in the Middle Assyrian laws.

show no pity This clause is used in cases where one might be tempted to be lenient, in this case because the woman's motive—the defense of her husband—was honorable.

HONEST WEIGHTS AND MEASURES (vv. 13–16)

Only honest weights and measures are permitted. The importance of this principle, so crucial for the justice and stability of commerce within a society, was widely emphasized in the ancient Near East.

13. You shall not have Not only may one not use deceptive weights and measures, one may not even possess them.

pouch Where merchants carried their weights.

alternate weights Literally, “stone and stone.” The weights in question were used on balance scales to determine the weight of money and commodities. The standard weight was the shekel, ap-

proximately 0.4 ounce (11 g), although it varied in different periods. One may not use the large weight to receive more or the small weight to give less. Ancient Babylonian writings contain many accounts about the violation of this norm. Numerous stone and metal weights of the standard shekel and its fractions and multiples have been found in archaeological excavations.

14. alternate measures Literally, “alternate *ephah* measures.” The *ephah* (standing here for all measures) was not a measuring device but a unit of capacity of pottery containers used for grain; see Comment to Exod. 16:36. The size and weight of such large containers made it difficult for buyers or sellers of grain to carry their own jars from place to place to verify the amounts involved in a sale.

15. completely honest Literally, “complete and honest.” In Hebrew, the words appear at the beginning of the verse, where they serve as a contrast to verse 14 and gain an emphatic sense: “only completely honest weights.”

if you are to endure long Long life, for the individual or the nation, is the reward granted by God for obedience to His laws.

REMEMBERING AMALEKITE AGGRESSION (vv. 17–19)

The Amalekites were a nomadic group living in

12. cut off her hand That is, “leave her with diminished financial resources” (*Ha-amek Davar*). The Sages shrank from taking this punishment literally; they substituted a monetary fine for mutilation.

16. your God The Jew who cheats in busi-

ness may no longer call upon “my God.” Such behavior is detestable in God's sight. God will no longer tolerate being associated with that person (Hirsch).

17. The text mentions the predations of Amalek right after discussing just weights and

journey, after you left Egypt—¹⁸how, undeterred by fear of God, he surprised you on the march, when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. ¹⁹Therefore, when the LORD your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a hereditary portion, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

בַּצֵּאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם: ¹⁸ אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ וַיִּזְנֶב בְּךָ כָּל־הַנְּחָשִׁים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאֵתָה עִיף וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים: ¹⁹ וְהָיָה בְּהַנִּיחַ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְךָ מִכָּל־אֲבִיבֵיךָ מִסְבִּיב בְּאָרְצְךָ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה־אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ תִּמְחָה אֶת־זְכֹר עַמְּלֶךָ מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא תִשְׁכַּח: פ

the Sinai desert and the part of the Negeb that was south of the territory of Judah. Nothing is known of them from sources outside the Bible. Israel's experience with them must have been particularly bitter to have led to the resolve to wipe them out. The account in Exod. 17:8–16 offers no explanation for that determination, but Deuteronomy does: The Amalekites staged a sneak attack on the defenseless weak lagging at the rear of the migrating Israelites, an attack that showed Amalek to be uncommonly ruthless, lacking in even the most elementary decency. Conceivably, the Israelites thought that the Amalekites had genocidal intentions, and regarded the command to annihilate them as measure-for-measure punishment.

17. The exhortation to remember is echoed by “Do not forget” in verse 19.

what Amalek did to you There is no indication of what prompted the Amalekites to attack. It has been conjectured that they saw the Israelites as a potential threat to their control of the oases and pasturelands in the Sinai and the Negeb. In view of the Amalekites' later character as marauders, however, it is just as likely that their attack

was a plundering raid on a target of opportunity.

18. undeterred by fear of God The Amalekites are not expected to fear *YHVH*, the God of Israel, whom they do not recognize. That is why the term used here is “fear of God” (*elohim*, the more general term for the deity), meaning fear of the divine. The Bible knows that non-Israelite religions also teach that the gods punish sin; and when it refers to pagans who are or are not heedful of that belief, it uses the more general term “God” (see Gen. 20:11). The Amalekites lacked the basic principles of morality common to all religions.

stragglers Those traveling at the rear would include the sick and weak who could not keep up with the others. Anyone with elementary decency would avoid attacking them.

19. when God grants you safety Once Israel is securely settled in the Land, with no threat left to its existence, it is to turn its attention to Amalek.

blot out the memory That is, blot out their name, wipe them out. The Israelites are not being commanded here to eradicate all recollection of the Amalekites. Indeed, they are commanded to remember forever what the Amalekites did.

measures, to warn us that when people cheat each other, the national bonds of unity, loyalty, and mutual trust are strained and the nation becomes vulnerable to Amalek (Tanḥ.).

undeterred by fear of God Literally, “not fearing God.” In Hebrew, this phrase follows “you were famished and weary”; to whom does it refer? To Amalek? Or to the stragglers who had lost faith—thus becoming vulnerable to Amalek? If the former, “fearing God” means having empathy for the powerless who are at your mercy (as the Egyptian midwives who “feared God” spared Israelite babies in Exod. 1:17).

18. surprised you Hebrew: *korkha*, which the Midrash relates to the word for “cold” (*kor*). The Israelites, leaving Egypt on the way to Sinai, had been confident and enthusiastic. The real sin of Amalek was that he robbed them of their idealism, teaching them that the world could be an unreliable and dangerous place.

19. The commandment to blot out the name and the memory of the wicked may be thematically related to the commandment earlier in the chapter to perpetuate the name of the man who died childless.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

25:19. blot out . . . Amalek This verse is the source for the custom of drowning out the name of Haman (by tradition a descendent of Amalek) with raucous noise during the reading of *M'gillat Ester* on *Purim*.

הַפְּטָרָה פֶּרֶשְׁת זְכוֹר

HAFTARAH FOR PARASHAT ZAKHOR

1 SAMUEL 15:2–34 (*Ashk'nazim*)

1 SAMUEL 15:1–34 (*S'fardim*)

This *haftarah* first presents Saul's battle against the Amalekites. Then it describes how God rejected him as king for disobeying the divine command of utter extermination of that nation and its livestock. (Centuries earlier, according to Exodus, "Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim" [17:8]. Later, with God's help, "Joshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword" [17:13]. That event was inscribed in a document in which the Lord stated, "I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven" [17:14].)

In Deut. 25:17–19, read as the concluding (*maftir*) Torah selection on *Shabbat Zakhor*, the Israelites are called upon to remember Amalek's surprise attack against "all the stragglers" who made up the weary and famished rearguard of the people during the wilderness trek from Egypt. In Deuteronomy, it is the people who must remember the enemy and destroy it—not God. It must be done "when the LORD your God grants you safety from all your enemies around you [*oy'vekha mi-saviv*]."

The Book of Samuel seems to suggest that this time had come, for the summary of Saul's battles (1 Sam. 14:47) states that the king "waged war on every side against all his enemies [*saviv b'khol oy'vav*]." It is in this context that the battle against Amalek is mentioned (v. 48).

The *haftarah*, which follows in chapter 15, provides a fuller, theological perspective that blends the two Torah traditions. God announces that He will now requite the Amalekites for their actions against the Israelites "on their way up from Egypt," a requital that Saul and the nation must exact (15:2–3). God's own vendetta against the Amalekites (Exod. 17:14) is thus combined here with the people's responsibility to destroy Amalek for having attacked Israel "on your journey, after you left Egypt" (Deut. 25:17,19). Saul's incom-

plete execution of God's command, together with the subsequent inquest and judgment against him through Samuel, constitute the successive sections of the *haftarah*.

The *haftarah's* repeated use of the words *kol* (voice) and *shama* (hear, obey) highlights its emphasis on obedience. The punishment for not obeying the divine word is rejection. Samuel states: "Because you [Saul] rejected the LORD's command, / He has rejected you as king" (1 Sam. 15:23). This strident and striking language alludes to the onset of the monarchy. After the people had first requested a king, and Samuel had resisted, a divine oracle had declared: "Heed the demand of the people in everything they say to you. For it is not you that they have rejected; it is Me they have rejected as their king" (8:7, cf. v. 21). The issue in both cases is the authority of divine sovereignty—unmediated by a human king, in the first instance; distorted by the human king, in the second. The people reject God in the first case; God rejects the king in the second (15:23,26). Indeed, it seems that God can accept the substitute of human kingship so long as divine authority remains in place. It is just this that Saul has challenged by his decision to revise or reinterpret the divine command.

There is great pathos in this *haftarah*—first, because Saul's sin is not a flagrant rejection of divine authority and second, because his repeated confessions and appeals for divine forgiveness are rejected. The reader is confronted with the austerity and stringency of God's demands and the brutality demanded of the Israelite nation. Mercy is prohibited; no one and nothing may be "spared." The war against the Amalekites is presented as a just war, punishing an offense centuries old. Rejection or reinterpretation of the absolute orders is completely out of the question. Whether as an actual event or as a literary case setting an exam-

ple, 1 Sam. 15:1–34 confronts us with a fierce and uncompromising theology. Its liturgical recitation, yearly, requires repeated moral and theological reflection.

According to a rabbinic tradition, Saul himself began this process by trying to undermine the divine order through legalistic and moral reasoning (see BT Yoma 22b; Eccles. R. 7:16). On the basis of the biblical rule requiring the sacrificial slaying of a heifer to atone for an unknown homicide (Deut. 21:1–9), he argued that innumerable innocent animals would be required to atone for the deaths of Amalekites. Moreover, he added, even if the adults were deserving of death, why include children in the proscription? According to this tradition, a divine voice then reproved him in the words of Ecclesiastes, “Do not be overly righteous” (7:16). The answer challenges the moral soul of the tradition.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

Parashat Zakhor (Deut. 25:17–19) is the second of four special Torah passages added to the regular *Shabbat* portion in the weeks before *Pesah*. It is recited on the *Shabbat* before *Purim*, even if *Purim* were to fall on the following *Shabbat*. (For details on the scheduling of the special Torah portions, see the introduction to the *haftarah* for *parashat Sh’kalim*.) In it, the Israelites are enjoined to remember (*zakhor*) what Amalek did to the people on their way out of Egypt, and to “blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!”

That same remembrance and that act of destruction are articulated in the *haftarah*. Indeed, because this *haftarah* is recited just before *Purim*—when the scroll of Esther is read and Haman the Agagite’s evil plots against the Jews of Persia are recalled—later generations could read into the assertion of divine remembrance an assurance that God remains steadfast to punish Amalek in all generations.

The link between 1 Sam. 15 and the scroll of Esther was drawn already in biblical times. Just as Saul is the son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin, so Mordecai’s lineage is traced to the line of Saul’s father (Esther 2:5). Just as the Israelite king defeats Amalek and its king, Agag, so the latter-day hero of the Jews foils the plots of Haman “the Agagite” (Esther 3:1,10). Amalek became a symbol of all the enemies of the Jews in all generations. In early midrashic homilies and in liturgical poetry composed for this *Shabbat Zakhor* in late antiquity, the foe was identified with Edom (the genealogy in Gen. 36:12 gave added proof). Through that identification, Amalek served as a symbol for Rome and for Christianity as well.

As a counterpoint, “Amalek” was later reinterpreted in terms of the evil inclination (cf. *Zohar* 3:281b) and religious failure. As a result, the eradication of Amalek became a process of psychospiritual development in certain circles. This more personal reading of the tradition, however, never displaced the national-historical one, and the two remain in tension. The carnival quality of *Purim* celebrations may dangerously mask the serious moral issues. Vengeance is not just the Lord’s; it is also enacted by people.

15 Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over His people Israel. Therefore, listen to the LORD’s command!

טו וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל-שָׂאוּל אֲתִי
שָׁלַח יְהוָה לְמַשְׁחֶךָ לְמֶלֶךְ עַל-עַמּוֹ
עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַתָּה שְׁמַע לְקוֹל דְּבָרֵי
יְהוָה: ס

1 Samuel 15:1–3. According to an early rabbinic tradition, the Israelites were commanded to do three things when they came into the Land:

establish a king, build the Temple, and destroy Amalek (Tosef. Sanh. 4:5; Sifrei Deut. 67).

²“Thus said the LORD of Hosts: I am exacting the penalty for what Amalek did to Israel, for the assault he made upon them on the road, on their way up from Egypt. ³Now go, attack Amalek, and proscribe all that belongs to him. Spare no one, but kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings, oxen and sheep, camels and asses!”

⁴Saul mustered the troops and enrolled them at Telaim: 200,000 men on foot, and 10,000 men of Judah. ⁵Then Saul advanced as far as the city of Amalek and lay in wait in the wadi. ⁶Saul said to the Kenites, “Come, withdraw at once from among the Amalekites, that I may not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they left Egypt.” So the Kenites withdrew from among the Amalekites.

⁷Saul destroyed Amalek from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is close to Egypt, ⁸and he captured King Agag of Amalek alive. He proscribed all the people, putting them to the sword; ⁹but Saul and the troops spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the second-born, the lambs, and all else that was of value. They would not proscribe them; they proscribed only what was cheap and worthless.

¹⁰The word of the LORD then came to Samuel:

¹¹“I regret that I made Saul king, for he has

3. Spare no one The Hebrew verb suggests a harsher command: “have no pity.”

4. mustered . . . enrolled The narrative is tightly textured. Not only is the theme of “hearing” or “heeding” (*shama*) repeated throughout the text (vv. 1,14,19,20,22,24); it also appears through puns. Thus the initial command was to “hear” (*sh'ma*) the divine word (v. 1); and Saul proceeds immediately to “muster” (*va-y'shamma*) the troops. Similarly, Samuel says that God “remembers” or “requites” (*pakad'ti*) the crime of the Amalekites (v. 2; the verb פקד serves double duty here). The same verb is used in the reference to Saul’s enrolling the troops (*va-yifk'dem*).

* Ashk'nazim start here.

² * כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה יְצַבְאוֹת פְּקַדְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה עִמָּלֶךְ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר-שָׂם לוֹ בְּדַרְךָ בְּעֵלְתוֹ מִמִּצְרַיִם: ³ עַתָּה לֶךְ וְהִפִּיתָה אֶת-עִמָּלֶךְ וְהִחַרְמְתָם אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-לוֹ וְלֹא תַחֲמַל עָלָיו וְהִמַּתָּה מֵאִישׁ עַד-אִשָּׁה מֵעַלְל וְעַד-יוֹנֵק מִשּׁוֹר וְעַד-שֵׂה מִגְּמַל וְעַד-חֲמוֹר: ^ס

⁴ וַיִּשְׁמַע שָׁאוּל אֶת-הָעָם וַיִּפְקְדֵם בְּטַלָּיִם מֵאֲתַיִם אֶלֶף רִגְלֵי וַעֲשָׂרַת אֲלָפִים אֶת-אִישׁ יְהוּדָה: ⁵ וַיָּבֵא שָׁאוּל עַד-עִיר עִמָּלֶךְ וַיִּרֶב בְּנַחַל: ⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל-הַקִּינִי לְכוּ סְרוּ רְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ עִמָּלְקֵי פֶן-אֶסְפְּךָ עִמּוֹ וְאַתָּה עֲשִׂיתָה חֹסֵד עִם-כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵלְוֹתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּסַּר קִינֵי מִתּוֹךְ עִמָּלֶךְ:

⁷ וַיִּךְ שָׁאוּל אֶת-עִמָּלֶךְ מִחֻוִּילָה בּוֹאֶךְ שׁוֹר אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי מִצְרַיִם: ⁸ וַיִּתְּפֹשׂ אֶת-אַגַּג מֶלֶךְ-עִמָּלֶךְ חַי וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעָם הַחֲרִיִּים לְפִי-חֶרֶב: ⁹ וַיַּחֲמַל שָׁאוּל וְהָעָם עַל-אַגַּג וְעַל-מִיטֵב הַצֹּאֵן וְהַבְּקָר וְהַמִּשְׁגִּים וְעַל-הַפְּרִיִּים וְעַל-כָּל-הַטּוֹב וְלֹא אָבוּ הַחֲרִיִּים וְכָל-הַמְּלֹאכָה נִמְבָּזָה וַנִּמַּס אֶתָּה הַחֲרִימוֹ: ^פ

¹⁰ וַיְהִי דְבַר-יְהוָה אֶל-שְׁמוּאֵל לֵאמֹר: ¹¹ נִחַמְתִּי כִּי-הִמְלַכְתִּי אֶת-שָׁאוּל לְמֶלֶךְ

Telaim In the Negeb (“Telem,” Josh. 15:24).

6. Sauls tells the Kenites to withdraw “from among the Amalekites,” as an act of gratitude for their past favors to Israel. Possibly this refers to wilderness guiding (see Num. 10:29–32); the precise events are nowhere stated. Presumably some Kenites encamped among the Amalekites, an association also found in Balaam’s prophecy (Num. 24:20–21).

11. I regret Hebrew: *nihamti*. This usage sets up an ironic contrast with verse 29. After Saul begs forgiveness, Samuel refuses his appeal, stating that God “does not . . . change His mind [*va-yinnaheem*].” But this change in divine favor

turned away from Me and has not carried out My commands.” Samuel was distressed and he entreated the LORD all night long.¹² Early in the morning Samuel went to meet Saul. Samuel was told, “Saul went to Carmel, where he erected a monument for himself; then he left and went on down to Gilgal.”

¹³When Samuel came to Saul, Saul said to him, “Blessed are you of the LORD! I have fulfilled the LORD’s command.”¹⁴ “Then what,” demanded Samuel, “is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of oxen that I hear?”¹⁵ Saul answered, “They were brought from the Amalekites, for the troops spared the choicest of the sheep and oxen for sacrificing to the LORD your God. And we proscribed the rest.”¹⁶ Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night!” “Speak,” he replied.¹⁷ And Samuel said, “You may look small to yourself, but you are the head of the tribes of Israel. The LORD anointed you king over Israel,¹⁸ and the LORD sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and proscribe the sinful Amalekites; make war on them until you have exterminated them.’¹⁹ Why did you disobey the LORD and swoop down on the spoil in defiance of the LORD’s will?”²⁰ Saul said to Samuel, “But I did obey the LORD! I performed the mission on which the LORD sent me: I captured King Agag of Amalek, and I proscribed Amalek,²¹ and the troops took from the spoil some sheep and oxen—the best of what had been proscribed—to sacrifice to the LORD your God at Gilgal.”²² But Samuel said:

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices

As much as in obedience to the LORD’s command?

is precisely what has produced Saul’s despair. Elsewhere, this verb does in fact indicate God’s regret at having created sinful humankind (Gen. 6:6: *va-yinnahem*), as well as God’s merciful forgiveness of penitents (Jon. 4:2: *v’niham*).

כִּי־שָׁבַ מֵאַחֲרַי וְאֶת־דְּבָרַי לֹא הִקִּים וַיִּחַר לְשִׁמוּאֵל וַיִּזְעַק אֶל־יְהוָה כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה׃¹² וַיִּשְׁכַּם שְׁמוּאֵל לְקִרְאֵת שָׁאוּל בַּבֶּקֶר וַיִּגְדַּל לְשִׁמוּאֵל לֵאמֹר בְּאֶ־שָׁאוּל הַכְּרַמְלָה וְהִנֵּה מִצִּיב לֹא יָד וַיִּסַּב וַיַּעֲבֹר וַיֵּרֶד הַגִּלְגָּל׃

¹³ וַיָּבֵא שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־שָׁאוּל וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ שָׁאוּל בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה לַיהוָה הִקִּימְתִי אֶת־דְּבַר יְהוָה׃¹⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל וּמַה קוֹל־הַצֹּאֵן הַזֶּה בְּאָזְנִי וְקוֹל הַבֶּקֶר אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי שֹׁמֵעַ׃¹⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל מֵעַמְלֵקֵי הַבִּיאוֹם אֲשֶׁר חָמַל הָעָם עַל־מִיטֵב הַצֹּאֵן וְהַבֶּקֶר לְמַעַן זָבַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְאֶת־הַיּוֹתֵר הִחְרַמְנוּ׃¹⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־שָׁאוּל הֲרָף וְאֶגִּידָה לְךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֵלַי הַלַּיְלָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ דִּבֶּר׃¹⁷ וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל הֲלוֹא אִם־קָטַן אַתָּה בְּעֵינַיִךְ רֹאשׁ שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתָּה וַיִּמְשַׁחְךָ יְהוָה לְמֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל׃¹⁸ וַיִּשְׁלַחְךָ יְהוָה בְּדֶרֶךְ וַיֹּאמֶר לְךָ וְהִחְרַמְתָּהּ אֶת־הַחֲטָאִים אֶת־עַמְלֵק וְנִלְחַמְתָּ בוֹ עַד בְּלוֹתָם אִתָּם׃¹⁹ וְלָמָּה לֹא־שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה וַתַּעַטְּ אֶל־הַשְּׁלָל וַתַּעַשׂ הָרַע בְּעֵינַי יְהוָה׃²⁰ וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁאוּל אֶל־שְׁמוּאֵל אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּקוֹל יְהוָה וְאַלֶּךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַחְנִי יְהוָה וְאַבִּיא אֶת־אֲגַג מֶלֶךְ עַמְלֵק וְאֶת־עַמְלֵק הִחְרַמְתִּי׃²¹ וַיִּקַּח הָעָם מִהַשְּׁלָל צֹאֵן וּבֶקֶר רֵאשִׁית הַחֲרָם לְזָבַח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּגִּלְגָּל׃²² וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל

הַחֶפֶץ לַיהוָה בְּעֹלוֹת וּזְבָחִים
בְּשֹׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה

21. the best Hebrew: *reishit*. In his second justification, Saul uses a more cultic term for what he earlier called “the choicest” (*meitav*) of the livestock (v. 15).

Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice,
Compliance than the fat of rams.

²³For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
Defiance, like the iniquity of teraphim.

Because you rejected the LORD's command,
He has rejected you as king."

²⁴Saul said to Samuel, "I did wrong to transgress the LORD's command and your instructions; but I was afraid of the troops and I yielded to them. ²⁵Please, forgive my offense and come back with me, and I will bow low to the LORD." ²⁶But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not go back with you; for you have rejected the LORD's command, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel."

²⁷As Samuel turned to leave, Saul seized the corner of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has this day torn the kingship over Israel away from you and has given it to another who is worthier than you. ²⁹Moreover, the Glory of Israel does not deceive or change His mind, for He is not human that He should change His mind." ³⁰But [Saul] pleaded, "I did wrong. Please, honor me in the presence of the elders of my people and in the presence of Israel, and come back with me until I have bowed low to the LORD your God." ³¹So Samuel followed Saul back, and Saul bowed low to the LORD.

³²Samuel said, "Bring forward to me King Agag of Amalek." Agag approached him with faltering steps; and Agag said, "Ah, bitter death is at hand!"

³³Samuel said:

"As your sword has bereaved women,
So shall your mother be bereaved among
women."

הִנֵּה שְׁמַעַל מִזֹּבַח טוֹב
לְהִקְשִׁיב מִחֶלֶב אֵילִים:
כִּי חֲטֹאת־קֶסֶם מְרִי
וְאָנֹן וּתְרָפִים הִפְצַר
יַעַן מָאֲסַתְּ אֶת־דְּבַר יְהוָה
וַיִּמְאַסְךָ מִמְּלָכָה: ס

²⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂאוּל אֶל־שְׁמוּאֵל חֲטָאתִי כִּי־
עֲבַרְתִּי אֶת־פִּי־יְהוָה וְאֶת־דְּבַר־יְהוָה כִּי
יֵרְאֵתִי אֶת־הָעַם וְאֲשַׁמַּע בְּקוֹלָם:
²⁵ וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא אֶת־חַטָּאתִי וְשׁוּב עִמָּי
וְאֲשַׁתְּחִוֶה לַיהוָה: ²⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל־
שָׂאוּל לֹא אָשׁוּב עִמָּךְ כִּי מָאֲסַתְּהָ אֶת־
דְּבַר יְהוָה וַיִּמְאַסְךָ יְהוָה מִהַיּוֹת מֶלֶךְ
עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל: ס

²⁷ וַיִּסַּב שְׁמוּאֵל לָלֶכֶת וַיִּחַזַק בְּכַנְף־מַעֲיָלוֹ
וַיִּקְרַע: ²⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו שְׁמוּאֵל קְרַע יְהוָה
אֶת־מַמְלְכוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַלְיֶיךָ הַיּוֹם וּנְתַנָּה
לְרַעְךָ הַטּוֹב מִמֶּךָ: ²⁹ וְגַם נִצַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל
לֹא יִשְׁקַר וְלֹא יִנָּחֵם כִּי לֹא אָדָם הוּא
לְהִנָּחֵם: ³⁰ וַיֹּאמֶר חֲטָאתִי עַתָּה כַּבְּדֵנִי
נָא נִגַּד זְקֵנִי־עִמָּי וְנִגַּד יִשְׂרָאֵל וְשׁוּב עִמָּי
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתִי לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: ³¹ וַיֵּשֶׁב
שְׁמוּאֵל אַחֲרַי שָׂאוּל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה שָׂאוּל
לַיהוָה: ס

³² וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל הִגִּישׁוּ אֵלַי אֶת־אַגָּג
מֶלֶךְ עַמְלֵק וַיֵּלֶךְ אֵלָיו אַגָּג מַעֲדַנֵּת וַיֹּאמֶר
אַגָּג אֲכַן סָר מִר־הַמּוֹת: ס
³³ וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל

כַּאֲשֶׁר שִׁכְּלָה נָשִׁים חֲרָבְךָ
כִּן־תִּשְׁכַּל מִנָּשִׁים אִמְךָ

32. with faltering steps Hebrew verbal stem: (dittography) of the similar-looking word *mar* (bitter). In fact, a word for *sar* is missing in the ancient Greek translation (Septuagint). On this basis, the king simply and poignantly cried:

Ab, bitter death is at hand Hebrew: *akhen sar mar ha-mavet*. The word *sar* (rendered as "at hand") is very likely a mistaken scribal doubling "Surely, death is bitter!"

And Samuel cut Agag down before the LORD
at Gilgal.

³⁴Samuel then departed for Ramah, and Saul
went up to his home at Gibeah of Saul.

וַיִּשְׁטֹף שְׁמוּאֵל אֶת־אֲגַג לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
בְּגִלְגָּל: ס
³⁴וַיֵּלֶךְ שְׁמוּאֵל הָרְמָתָה וַיֵּשְׁבֵהוּ עַל־הַר
אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ גְּבֵעַת שָׁאוּל: