

Nahmanides' Introduction to Parashat Terumah

When God spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel face to face, and gave them (through Moses) a few other commandments that serve as underlying principles for the rest of the commandments—the same practice that our Sages observed with regard to those who wished to convert to Judaism—and Israel accepted upon themselves the observance of whatever else He might command them through Moses, He made a covenant with them on this basis. This made them His people and Him their God, in accordance with the conditions He had originally established: “If you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples” (19:5). If they were to be “a holy nation” (19:6), it behooved them to have a holy place, a sanctuary, in their midst, where God’s Presence could rest among them. So He first [A] commanded them about the Tabernacle in order to have a home among them, sanctified for His name, where He could speak with Moses and give commandments to the Israelites. The essential thing God wanted from the Tabernacle was a place for the Shekhinah to rest, and that is the Ark (25:22). Thus the Ark and its cover are mentioned first, because their status is the highest. The table and the lampstand come next, being utensils that, like the Ark, demonstrate for what purpose the Tabernacle was made. When Moses transmitted the commandments about the Tabernacle, however (in 35:11–19), and when Bezalel actually made it (in chs. 36–38), the Tabernacle itself is mentioned first, since in practical terms it had to be made first.

The mystery behind the Tabernacle is that God’s Presence, which “abode” (*shakhan*) publicly on Mount Sinai (24:16), would discreetly do the same in the Tabernacle (*mishkan*). Note that in 40:34–35 the phrase “the Presence of the LORD filled the Tabernacle” appears twice, matching the double phrase “His Presence and His Greatness” of Deut. 5:21. The Presence that Israel saw at Sinai would always be with them in the Tabernacle. The same utterance that communicated with Moses on Mount Sinai would come to him when he entered the Tabernacle. Just as at Sinai “from the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; on earth He let you see His great fire; and from amidst that fire you heard His words” (Deut. 4:36), so “when Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, he would hear the Voice speaking to him from above the cover that was on top of the Ark of the Pact between the two cherubim; thus He spoke to him” (Num. 7:89). The repetition in this verse of the verb “to speak” confirms what tradition says, that each utterance would first come down from heaven to the Ark cover and then speak to Moses from between the two cherubs. For every communication with Moses took place not in a dream but during the day. Both the cherubim were of fiery gold so that the Voice could come “from amidst that fire” (Deut. 4:36). One who carefully examines the verses describing the giving of the Torah, and understands what we have written concerning them, will understand the mystery of the Tabernacle and the Temple. One can comprehend it from the fact that Solomon, in his prayer at the inauguration of the Temple, used the name “O LORD God of Israel” (1 Kings 8:23), just as the elders at Mount Sinai saw “the God of Israel” (24:10). But Solomon added the Tetragrammaton to make clear that prayers were addressed to God’s merciful aspect. [B]

[A] After the Ten Commandments and the few “underlying principles” of chs. 21–23. [B] See Nahmanides’ comment to 24:10. We omit a somewhat more extensive discussion of various verses using different names for God.

NJPS 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

RASHI 8 Make Me a sanctuary. Make a sanctified home for My Name.

9 Exactly as I show you. This is connected with the previous verse. The sense is “Make me a sanctuary exactly as I show you.” So shall you make it. This is an additional commandment, extending the obligation of building the Tabernacle to future generations. If one of the objects is destroyed, or when you make Me objects for the permanent Temple (as did Solomon), you shall make them exactly according to this pattern. “Even so shall you make it” (OJPS) shows that this is the correct interpretation; otherwise, the phrase would belong with v. 10, referring to the Tent of Meeting and its utensils.

10 They shall make an ark. Like the sort of chest that is made without legs, constructed like a box. It rests flat on its bottom.

NAHMANIDES properties, are not complete unless they are polished—like the “smooth stones” David used to kill Goliath—by natural processes only. Onkelos too does not use the Aramaic word for “fill” here, but that for “complete.” (He does the same in 35:35, “He filled them with wisdom,” since wisdom is after all not a substance that can “fill” a container. Rather, God made them completely wise.) There were three lapis lazuli stones, two for the ephod and one for the breastpiece; the other, “full” unworked stones, were all for the breastpiece. But if our Sages are to be understood as saying that unworked stones were required for the ephod as well, then both types of stones refer to both objects.

9 So shall you make it. See Rashi’s comment. But I do not know how it could be true that Solomon had to make all the objects for the Temple exactly to the pattern of those specified here, if the bronze altar that Solomon made was “20 cubits long, 20 cubits wide, and 10 cubits high” (2 Chron. 4:1). Ibn Ezra thinks that “so shall you make” (for “it” is not in the Hebrew) refers to the utensils, matching the commandment in v. 8 to make the Tabernacle. But in a straightforward reading there is no need to go to such lengths. The repetition serves as encouragement and exhortation. “Make me a sanctuary” (v. 8)—including the furnishings inside it—as a king’s sanctuary and a royal palace, “that I may dwell among them” (v. 8) in the House, and on the Throne of Glory, that they make for Me there. “So shall you make it” means that they must all do it diligently and with alacrity. There is a comparable repetition in 39:32, “The Israelites did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so they did.”

10 They shall make an ark. “They” refers to the Israelite people, mentioned in v. 2. The imperatives that follow (“overlay,” v. 11; “cast,” v. 12; and so on) revert to the

9 As I show you. In “visions of God” (Ezek. 1:1, 8:3, 40:2); but he saw them with his eyes, unlike Ezekiel, who saw them in a dream. **The Tabernacle.** The Tabernacle is the “sanctuary” commanded in v. 8. **So shall you make it.** Literally, “And you shall so make.” “Let them make” (v. 8) refers to the Tabernacle, this phrase to its furnishings.

10 They shall make an ark. [H] The ark was four-sided and rested on four feet (see v. 12). **Two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high.** We do not know whether these are the internal or external dimensions. If external, we

[G] There follows a long section in which Ibn Ezra points out where in the Tabernacle each of the materials was to be used. and apparently corrupt.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 8 Let them make Me a sanctuary. This is a positive commandment, and must be carried out during the day, not at night. It is called a sanctuary because it is a place sanctified to the service of God, and serves as proof of His reality (Gersonides).

9 Exactly as I show you. “That I may dwell among them” (v. 8) exactly as I show you here on the mountain—to receive their prayer and their service (Sforno). This implies that the construction of the Tabernacle alludes to the form of the world. It is implausible that all of this could be specified just for the sake of ornamentation—though the allusions that Gersonides imagines he has found here are so absurd that I will not even dignify them with a response (Abarbanel). **So shall you make it.** In such a way that I dwell among you, and not as it was before the Golden Calf episode, when the plan was that “in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you” (20:21) (Sforno).

10 An ark. The straightforward sense of the verse makes clear that the Ark had no feet (Gersonides). The Ark was set at the far west to distance them from worship of the sun (Abarbanel).

OJPS for the ephod, and for the breastplate. ⁸And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. ⁹According to all that I show thee, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the furniture thereof, even so shall ye make it.

¹⁰And they shall make an ark of acacia-wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the

לְאַפֹּד וְלַחֹשֶׁן : וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנֹתַי
בְּתוֹכָם : כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר אָנִי מְרַאֶה אוֹתְךָ
אֵת תְּבִנֹת הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְאֵת תְּבִנֹת כָּל־כֵּלָיו
וְכֵן תַּעֲשׂוּ : ס

וְעָשׂוּ אֲרוֹן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אֲמֹתַיִם וְחֻצְי
ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + Why does God say “let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them” (v. 8) as if He were a physical being who could be limited in place—the opposite of the truth, and in flat contradiction to Isa. 66:1 and 1 Kings 8:27?

RASHBAM 8 A sanctuary. The word implies a place set aside for meeting; “I will sanctify and prepare Myself for them, to speak from within it.” See 29:43, “There I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified by My Presence.”

9 Exactly as I show you. The Holy One literally showed Moses images of all the utensils and all the construction, just like the “visions of God” (Ezek. 40:2) in which Ezekiel, in Babylonia, was shown the Second Temple. It was explained to him by means of words as well: “Mortal, look closely and listen attentively and note well everything I am going to show you” (Ezek. 40:4). V. 40 here, “the patterns ... that are being shown you on the mountain,” proves that Moses was shown images as well as words; if he was “shown” only in speech, there would have been no need to say that they were shown to him “on the mountain.” [B]

10 They shall make an ark of acacia wood. When Bezalel actually makes them,

[B] Perhaps the point is that Moses could take the Torah’s written instructions down from the mountain with him, but not the images, which were shown to him only “on the mountain.”

IBN EZRA since the breastpiece was doubled over and the stones “filled in” the space in the middle. Others say the term is used simply because the breastpiece was filled with stones, while the ephod, which was much larger, had only two, one on each shoulder. Saadia thinks it refers to the way the stones are attached to the breastpiece in orderly rows. [G]

8 Sanctuary. A “sanctuary” is a “sanctified,” holy place, the Tabernacle of the holy God.