

Shabbat and the Tabernacle

The connection between Shabbat and the Tabernacle

The juxtaposition of Shabbat and the Tabernacle

There is a clear link in the Torah between Shabbat and the Tabernacle. On at least two occasions Shabbat is mentioned alongside the labors of the Tabernacle. The first time is in the first part of *Parashat Ki Tisa* (*Shemot* 31:1–16):

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to devise skillful works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, and in cutting of stones for setting, and in carving of wood, to work in all manner of workmanship . . . that they may make all that I have commanded you.

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak you also unto the children of Israel, saying: **However**, you shall keep My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that ye may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, for it is holy to you . . . The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant.

The Torah concludes the commands of the Tabernacle, and immediately afterward mentions the mitzvot of Shabbat: “However, you shall keep My Sabbaths.” This teaches that despite the command to construct the Tabernacle, the observance of Shabbat must be carefully preserved.

After the commandment of Shabbat, the Torah recounts the sin of worshipping the Golden Calf and its ramifications. Following the chapter of the Golden Calf, at the start of *Parashat Vayak’hel*, the Torah returns to the topic of Shabbat, and immediately afterward

it describes the beginning of the construction of the Tabernacle (*Shemot* 35:1–5):¹⁷

And Moshe assembled all the congregation of the children of Israel, and said to them: ‘These are the words which the Lord has commanded, that you should do them. Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day, a Sabbath of solemn rest to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day.

And Moshe spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying: This is the thing which the Lord commanded, saying: Take you from among you an offering to the Lord, who-soever is of a willing heart, let him bring it, the Lord’s offering: Gold and silver and brass.

It seems that Shabbat and the Tabernacle are linked closely together, to such an extent that when the Torah reiterates the command of the Tabernacle after the sin of worshipping the Golden Calf, it finds it necessary to repeat the command about Shabbat as well.

Thus, Shabbat is surrounded by the Tabernacle:

The command of the Tabernacle: 25:2–31:11

Shabbat: 31:12–17

Sin of worshipping the Golden Calf: 31:18–34:35

Shabbat: 35:1–3

The construction of the Tabernacle: 35:4–40:38

17. This is a familiar pattern in the Torah. When addressing a particular topic and then turning to address a different topic, upon concluding the second topic the Torah will briefly recapitulate the first one. A salient example of this appears in *Shemot*, chapter 6. Verses 29–30 reiterate verses 11–12, after the Torah had interrupted the narrative thread to list the lineage of Moshe and Aharon (see **Rashi** on verse 29). In this case it appears that this sin of worshipping the Golden Calf is not simply a break between the passages. Shabbat is a sign between God and Israel, and as the sin of worshipping the Golden Calf negated the covenant, it was necessary to repeat the covenant once again.

The construction
of the Tabernacle
does not override
Shabbat

Indeed, the Sages derive from here that the **construction of the Tabernacle does not override Shabbat**, as explained, among other places, in the *Mekhilta* (*Vayak'hel, Mesekhta DeShabbata*, 1):

“And Moshe assembled, etc.” Why is this chapter stated? Because the verse states (*Shemot* 25:8): “And let them make Me a Sanctuary,” [and consequently] I [might] understand [that this applies] both on weekdays and on Shabbat... [therefore] the verse states: “And Moshe assembled [... Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you a holy day,” which means you shall labor for the Tabernacle] on weekdays but not on Shabbat.

As explained above, this idea is expressed in even clearer fashion in the first mention of Shabbat, as the Torah moves from discussing the Tabernacle to Shabbat by means of a contrasting word: “That they may make all that I have commanded you... **However**, you shall keep My Sabbaths” (*Shemot* 31:11–13). The Rashbam explains (*ad loc.*):

“However, you shall keep My Sabbaths”; you shall not perform even the labor of the Tabernacle on Shabbat.¹⁸

It can be inferred from here that **Shabbat is more important than the Tabernacle**. Why is this so? It may be suggested that the holiness of Shabbat is a **sanctuary in time**, whereas the holiness of the Tabernacle is a **sanctuary in space**. Since the sanctity of time was established back in the days of creation, it takes precedence over the sanctity of place. Consequently, the sanctity of Shabbat overrides the sanctity of the Tabernacle.

The Tabernacle
service overrides
Shabbat

This idea leads to a further difficulty. The Torah states in *Parashat Pinehas* (*Bemidbar* 28:9–10):

And on the Sabbath day two lambs of the first year without blemish, and two tenth parts of an ephah of fine flour for a

18. **Rashi** and the **Ramban** both explain that the verse is teaching that the labor of the Tabernacle may not be performed on Shabbat, but they disagree over how exactly this principle is derived from the verse; see their commentaries.

meal-offering, mingled with oil, and its drink-offering. This is the burnt-offering of every Sabbath, beside the continual burnt-offering, and its drink-offering.

In other words, the priests would sacrifice offerings in the Tabernacle on Shabbat, specifically the daily offerings and the additional offerings, despite the fact that the sacrificial process involves actions prohibited on Shabbat. Although individual offerings were not sacrificed on Shabbat, communal offerings were.¹⁹ If so, it seems that **the Tabernacle service supersedes Shabbat**.

One answer to this difficulty is that in principle Shabbat overrides the Tabernacle, as Shabbat attests to the **creation of the world**. Outside the Tabernacle one must observe Shabbat in order to attest to the creation, but inside the Tabernacle, which is **a place filled by the glory of God**, there is no need for this testimony.

Furthermore, the sacrifice of offerings on Shabbat in the Tabernacle attests that observance of Shabbat outside the Tabernacle is performed in accordance with the word of God. After all, outside the Tabernacle the people of Israel refrain from performing labor on Shabbat. One might mistakenly think that the point of this day is solely to provide the nation with rest, that Shabbat serves a human purpose. Therefore, the service of the offerings on Shabbat in the Tabernacle serves to testify that **Shabbat is Shabbat to God**. Within the Temple, in the place where the Divine Presence rests, communal offerings are sacrificed on Shabbat. The sanctity of the Divine Presence exists there, and one must increase holiness by sacrificing offerings, even on Shabbat. Shabbat is not intended for our relaxation; rather, it is **a Shabbat for God**. In the Temple, the place of the Divine Presence, labor is performed on Shabbat, as the

The service on Shabbat in the Tabernacle attests to the Shabbat observed outside

19. According to the **mishna** in *Temura* (14a), any offering that must be brought at a fixed time overrides Shabbat. There is a discussion with regard to the sacrifice of the Paschal offering on Shabbat; the halakhic ruling is that it too overrides the holy day (see **mishna** *Pesaḥim* 6:1; *Tosefta Pesaḥim* 4:13–14; *Pesaḥim* 66a; *Yerushalmi Pesaḥim* 6:1).

purpose of this labor is to serve God, to add holiness through the offerings, whereas outside the Temple, “you shall not do any manner of work,” as it is Shabbat to God.

Before the Divine Presence rested in the Tabernacle, its construction did not override Shabbat

If so, why didn’t the **construction of the Tabernacle** override Shabbat? The answer is simple: While the Tabernacle was being built, the Divine Presence did not yet rest there, and consequently its construction did not override Shabbat. It was only after the building was completed that the glory of God filled the Tabernacle (*Shemot* 40:33–34):

And he reared up the court round about the Tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the gate of the court. So Moshe finished the work. Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.

From this point forward the sacrificial service in the Tabernacle is performed even on Shabbat, as the glory of God now rests in the Tabernacle. This entails both that God must be honored through the sacrifices and that there is no concern that the labor of the sacrifices might impair the essence of Shabbat. This service attests to the Creator of the world, and is therefore the fulfillment, rather than the profanation, of Shabbat.²⁰

This issue can be understood in a different manner.

20. For this reason the **Gemara** in *Yoma* (46b) states that the sacrifice of offerings in the Tabernacle is “permitted” on Shabbat rather than “overrides” Shabbat. In other words, the act is entirely permitted, and it is not the case that there is a prohibition of performing labor here that is overridden due to the importance of the sacrificial service.