

# The Tabernacle and the creation of the world

Parallels between  
the Tabernacle and  
the creation

There are many parallel expressions in the accounts of the Tabernacle and creation of the world:

INTRODUCTION TO THE MITZVOT OF SHABBAT

Creation of the world	Tabernacle
And God <b>saw all</b> that He had made, <b>and, behold</b> , it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day ( <i>Bereshit</i> 1:31).	And Moshe <b>saw all</b> the work, <b>and, behold</b> , they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, even so had they done it. And Moshe blessed them ( <i>Shemot</i> 39:43).
<b>And</b> God <b>made</b> the firmament ( <i>Bereshit</i> 1:7). <b>And</b> God <b>made</b> the two great lights ( <i>Bereshit</i> 1:16). <b>And</b> God <b>made</b> the beast of the earth after its kind ( <i>Bereshit</i> 1:25).	In the chapters of the construction of the Tabernacle ( <i>Shemot</i> 36–39) the formula “he made” or “they made” occurs dozens of times.
<b>And</b> God <b>blessed them</b> ; and God said unto them: Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it ( <i>Bereshit</i> 1:28).	<b>And</b> Moshe <b>blessed them</b> ( <i>Shemot</i> 39:43).
<b>And</b> the heaven and the earth <b>were finished</b> , and all the host of them. <b>And</b> on the seventh day God <b>finished</b> His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made ( <i>Bereshit</i> 2:1–2).	<b>And</b> Moshe <b>finished</b> the work ( <i>Shemot</i> 40:33).
<b>And the spirit of God</b> hovered over the face of the waters ( <i>Bereshit</i> 1:2).	<b>And</b> He has filled him with <b>the spirit of God</b> , in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship ( <i>Shemot</i> 35:31).
Shabbat at the conclusion of creation ( <i>Bereshit</i> 2:1–3).	Shabbat at the conclusion of the Tabernacle ( <i>Shemot</i> 31:12–17).

A similar comparison also appears in the Midrash (*Tanḥuma, Pekudei, 2*):

Rabbi Yaakov, son of Rabbi Yossi, says: Why does it state: “Lord, I love the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your

glory dwells” (*Tehillim* 26:8)? Because it is equal to the creation of the world. How so?

On the first [day] it is written: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (*Bereshit* 1:1), and it is written: “Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain” (*Tehillim* 104:2); and with regard to the Tabernacle, what is written? “And you shall make curtains of goats’ hair” (*Shemot* 26:7).

On the second [day] it is written: “Let there be a firmament” (*Bereshit* 1:6), and it says with regard to [the waters, an expression of] separation, as it is stated: “And let it divide the waters from the waters” (*Bereshit* 1:6); and with regard to the Tabernacle it is written: “And the veil shall divide for you” (*Shemot* 26:33).

On the third [day] it is written “water,” as it is stated: “Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together” (*Bereshit* 1:9); and with regard to the Tabernacle it is written: “And you shall also make a laver of brass, and its base of brass, etc., and you shall put water in it” (*Shemot* 30:18).

On the fourth [day, God] created lights, as it is stated: “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven” (*Bereshit* 1:14); and with regard to the Tabernacle it is written: “And you shall make a candlestick of gold” (*Shemot* 25:31).

On the fifth [day, God] created fowl, as it is stated: “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let fowl fly” (*Bereshit* 1:20); and correspondingly with regard to the Tabernacle, [there is an obligation] to sacrifice offerings of sheep and fowl.

On the sixth [day the first] man was created, as it is stated: “And God created man in His own image” (*Bereshit* 1:27), with the glory of his Creator; and with regard to the Tabernacle it is written [about] a man who is the High Priest, who is anointed to serve and attend before God.

On the seventh [day, it is written:] “And the heaven and the earth were finished” (*Bereshit* 2:1); and with regard to the Tabernacle it is written: “And all the work was finished” (*Shemot* 39:32).

With regard to the creation of the world, it is written: “And God blessed [them]” (*Bereshit* 1:28); and with regard to the Tabernacle it is written: “And Moshe blessed them” (*Shemot* 39:43).

With regard to the creation of the world, it is written: “And God finished” (*Bereshit* 2:2); and with regard to the Tabernacle it is written: “And it came to pass on the day that Moshe had finished” (*Bemidbar* 7:1).

With regard to the creation of the world, it is written: “And God sanctified it” (*Bereshit* 2:3); and with regard to the Tabernacle it is written: “And had anointed it and sanctified it” (*Bemidbar* 7:1).

And why is the Tabernacle equal to heaven and earth? Just as heaven and earth are witnesses with regard to Israel, as it is written: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day” (*Devarim* 30:19), so too the Tabernacle is testimony for Israel, as it is stated: “These are the accounts of the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of the testimony” (*Shemot* 38:21). Therefore, it is stated: “Lord, I love the habitation of Your House, and the place where Your glory dwells.”

**What is the significance of these parallels between the Tabernacle and the creation of the world?** We can suggest that it was the construction of the Tabernacle that completed the creation of the world.<sup>21</sup> This idea has various ramifications, two of which are explained below in brief:

The Tabernacle completes the creation of the world

21. It is likewise stated in the Midrash (*Pesikta Rabbati*, 6) with regard to the Temple: “Thus all the work was finished” (*Melakhim Alef* 7:51). It does not state here “the work,” but “all the work,” the work of the six days of creation. “From all His work which God in creating had made [*laasot*]” (*Bereshit* 2:3); it does not state here *asa*, had done, but *laasot*, [which literally means] to do. [This teaches that] there is still another labor [left to do]. When Shlomo came and built the Temple, God said: Now the work of heaven and earth has been completed [*shalma*]; “thus all the work was finished [*vatishlam*].” For this reason he was called **Shlomo**, as God completed [*hishlim*] the labor of the heaven and earth through his handiwork.

An allusion to this idea can also be found in the opinion of Rabbi Ye-

Our function in the world is to consecrate it

Ours is a material world, a world of practical action. Our task is to develop and improve the world, to fashion items for daily use, but also to infuse the world with sanctity, to bring the Tabernacle into the world. One of the features emphasized in the Tabernacle is the consecration of clothing, of priests, of the material world. This is our function in the world – to consecrate it, to sanctify material substances, to elevate the world to a higher plane.

Atonement is possible

Immediately after the creation of the world, Adam and Ḥava sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Although the concept of repentance existed before the world and Adam did repent, until the establishment of the Tabernacle the Torah does not explicitly state that there is a way to rectify one's sins. It was only when the Tabernacle was built, when the heights of sanctity were reached, that God taught that even in such a lofty world there are setbacks. Yet one can repair what was damaged. There are offerings; there is a way to atone for sins.

In any case, the basic principle is that the construction of the Tabernacle parallels the creation of the world. The Tabernacle is the place of building holiness in the world.<sup>22</sup>

The construction of the Tabernacle, like the creation of the world, stops on Shabbat

Now one can understand why the construction of the Tabernacle does not override Shabbat, whereas the sacrificial service is performed on Shabbat. The Tabernacle corresponds to the creation of

---

hoshua (*Rosh HaShana* 11a) that the world was created in Nisan (in contrast to the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer ad loc., that the world was created in Tishrei). Why Nisan of all months? Rabbi Yehoshua's statement may be derived, among other sources, from the establishment of the Tabernacle, which was on the first of Nisan (*Shemot* 40:17). Although the physical world was created in Tishrei, the creation was not completed until the first of Nisan. When the Tabernacle was finished, then the world was truly created.

22. See also the statement of Rav Ḥayim of Volozhin in his book *Nefesh HaḤayim* (1:4, in the note): "For the Tabernacle and the Temple incorporated all powers and higher worlds, and all orders of sanctity. All its chambers and storage places, its upper stories and rooms, and all the sacred vessels, **were all similar to the heavenly model.**" In other words, the Tabernacle is constructed in accordance with the prototype and the foundations of the creation of the world.

the world. On the seventh day, God rested from work in the creation of the world, and likewise one must rest on the seventh day from the construction of the Tabernacle. The cessation of the building of the Tabernacle on Shabbat is not indicative of the **lowly importance** of this construction, but the opposite; it reflects its **great importance**. The Tabernacle built by humans corresponds to the world created by God. On the seventh day God rested from the creation of the world, and for their part the people of Israel must refrain on Shabbat from building the Tabernacle. In this manner we become partners with God in the creation of the world, and we become similar to God: **Just as He rested from the creation of the world, we too rest from the “creation” of the Tabernacle.**

This claim does not apply to the sacrificial services in the Tabernacle. Although God rested on the seventh day **from creating the world**, the world continues to function even on Shabbat. The sun, moon, stars, indeed the entire creation, and even people (apart from the children of Israel, who rest in a manner similar to God) all continue to function as normal on Shabbat. Just as the world itself continues to function even on Shabbat, the same applies to the sacrificial service with regard to communal offerings. The Tabernacle completes the world; it provides the world with the power of holiness and purity. As the world performs labor, the priests in the Tabernacle must do likewise.

The service in the Tabernacle continues on Shabbat, like the functioning world