

Immanuel: Welcome to *Parshat Vayakhel*.¹

In this week's *parsha*, we hear about the Mishkan's construction. And if you're thinking "wait a minute, I just saw these exact details a few weeks ago in *Parshat Terumah* (Contribution) and *Tetzaveh* (You shall command), you're not alone. Not only are many of the details repeated, but they are repeated verbatim, only before—in *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*—these details were instructions, and here, they are plans coming to fruition. Israel is finally building the Mishkan.

Couldn't the text have just said "Israel did as they were commanded," or "Israel built the Mishkan, exactly like God had instructed them to?" Why are we getting the details again, in full?

Here at Aleph Beta, we believe the key to unlocking the mystery of repetition lies not in the similarities of the two accounts, but in their differences.

Building the Tabernacle—with Small Discrepancies?

Only once we have pinpointed the differences, can we truly understand why the details were repeated in the first place and what this repetition might be trying to teach us.

Join us as this week as we unravel the mystery of the repeating Mishkan instructions ...

I'm Imu Shalev ... Let's bring up our 20 second *parsha* recap.

After coming down from Sinai in last week's *parsha*, Moses gathers the people, commands them to keep the Sabbath, and conveys the instructions for building the Mishkan.

The people bring donations until the builders say that they have too much.

Then, the construction begins, and we get all the details that we saw in *Parshat Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*.

They build the structure, the partitions, the ark, table, menorah, the incense altar, the bronze altar, the wash basin, and the outer courtyard.

If you sift through the instructions from *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh* to the construction in *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* (Accounts), some glaring differences emerge.

Back in *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*, when God originally instructs Israel to build the Mishkan, the instructions are given from the inside out. First come the instructions for the Ark, then the details about the vessels

which are to be used and housed in the Mishkan, and then, finally, the instructions for the construction of the Mishkan itself.

But when the Mishkan is actually built, it gets built inversely. First the structure is erected, then the vessels.

Maybe the text doesn't say "They did as they were instructed" because they actually didn't. Why would they build the Mishkan in the inverse order they were commanded to build it?

There is a second major difference between the two accounts that we need to tackle, one that involves the *Mizbeach Hak'toret*, the incense altar.

The Tabernacle's Incense Altar—an Afterthought?

In *Terumah* and *Tetzaveh*, construction of the incense altar appears to be somewhat of an afterthought. It's not given with the rest of the *kelim*, the vessels. Back in the instructions, first you build the ark, then the vessels, then erect the Mishkan itself, then we have the commandments for the *kohanim*, the priests, and only then is the incense altar, the *mizbeach hak'toret*, commissioned.

But, in *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei*, when the Mishkan is actually constructed, the incense altar is built with all the other vessels. It's given the same focus and attention. Why was this altar not originally commissioned with the other vessels, and how could something so holy be treated as an afterthought?

Let's take a look at the function of the incense altar, and its role in the Mishkan. Perhaps the key to the differences lie there.

What Was the Role of the Altar of Incense?

Every day, the altar was used to bring incense offerings, but its moment of glory is mentioned in Leviticus, on one specific day: Yom Kippur. וְכִפֹּר

אֶהָרֹן עַל-קַרְנֹתָיו אֶחָת בַּשָּׁנָה (v'*chi-per Aha-ron al kar-notav achat ba-shanah*)—once a year, Aaron will make an atonement on its horns (Exo 30:10). On that day, Aaron takes incense from atop the Incense Altar and brings it into the Holy of Holies—where God's presence rests above the ark. Then: וְנָתַן אֶת-הַקְטֹרֶת עַל-הָאֵשׁ לִפְנֵי ה' (v'*natan et hak'toret al ha-esh lif-nei HaShem*) (Lev 16:13):—Aaron places incense on fire before God, וְכִסָּה עֲנַן הַקְטֹרֶת אֶת-הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָעֵדוּת (v'*ki-sa a'nan hak'toret et ha-kaporet asher al ha-ei-dut*) (ibid.)—and the cloud of the incense would cover the ark's lid.

The incense offering is described as forming a cloud. But where else do we have clouds in the Mishkan? In the Holy of Holies ... God tells Mo-

¹ <https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/taking-steps-towards-god>

ses about the ark: וְנִוְדַעְתִּי לְךָ שֵׁם וְדִבַּרְתִּי אִתְּךָ מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת (v'noad-ti l'cha sham v'di-barti it-cha mei-al ha-ka-poret) (Exo 25:22)—I'll meet you there and speak to you from above the ark's lid. But it wasn't only God's voice that manifested above the ark, it was His presence as well: כִּי בָעָנָן (ki be-anan ei-ra-eh al-ha-kaporet)—"Through a cloud I will be seen above the ark's lid" (Lev 16:2).

The cloud isn't just some detail about the Mishkan, it seems to be its very purpose. When the Mishkan is completed, the verse says, climatically, וַיִּכַּס הָעָנָן אֶת-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (va-y'chas he-anan et ohel mo-ed) (Exo 40:34)—the cloud covered the tent, וְכָבוֹד ה' מָלֵא אֶת-הַמִּשְׁכָּן (uch'vor HaShem maleh et ha-Mishkan) (ibid.) and **God's glory filled the Mishkan.** The very word, Mishkan, means resting place—a place for God's glory to rest among His people in a cloud.

What Does The Altar of Incense Represent? Steps to Intimacy with God

That wasn't the first time that God appeared to the people in a great cloud of glory. Almost the same words are used to describe God's glory at Har Sinai: וַיִּשְׁכֹּן כְּבוֹד־ה' עַל-הָר סִינַי (va-yishkon k'vod HaShem al-har Sinai) (Exo 24:16), the glory of God, rested on mount Sinai, וַיִּכְסֶה הָעָנָן (va-yecha-sehu he'anan) (ibid.), God's cloud covered the mountain. The same words, *mishkan*, *k'vod Hashem*, and *vayichas he'anan*, appear in both places.

The imagery is awe-inspiring. God is not of this world, we associate Him with the heavens, and yet, at Sinai, **in a great act of love and intimacy, He appears in a cloud, and descends from the heavens, in a grand gesture of revelation.** But God is not satisfied with His presence resting on a mountain. A mountain is tall, still above the people, and not truly among them. And that's where the Mishkan comes in.

In *Terumah*, God instructs Moses: וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם (v'asu li mikdash v'sha-chanti b'tocham) (Exo 25:8)—make for me a sanctuary, and I shall dwell amongst them. **God seems to mean this literally.** My cloud? My presence? It descended from the heavens on to Mount Sinai. But it's not going to stay there, out of your reach. I want you to build a place for me, where I will live among you. **I am approaching you from the heavens, and descending into a special place in your camp. Because I want a relationship with you.**

Except that unlike the cloud of God which descends from the heavens to rest upon the Mishkan and the ark, we have a cloud of our own. The cloud of incense. the incense cloud is a terrestrial cloud. It is offered by

man, by the Kohen, our representative, and ascends, heavenward, in humanity's approach to God.

The Purpose of the Temple's Incense Altar

On Yom Kippur, Aaron would take our cloud into the Holy of Holies, and it would engulf the ark's lid, exactly where God's cloud rested. Our incense cloud would merge with God's. One day a year, at the height of our relationship with God, His heavenly cloud would descend to meet our terrestrial cloud. It was symbolic of humanity's purpose: God's loving approach to His creation, and our reciprocal approach to our Creator.

That was the purpose of the Incense Altar. The incense offering throughout the year represented mankind's terrestrial ascension, our struggle and our desire to constantly be approaching God. One day a year, our cloud actually meets His; heaven and earth meet in the loving embrace of oneness.

Now we may be able to understand the discrepancies between *Terumah/Tetzaveh* and *Vayakhel*.

The Meaning of the Incense Altar: Taking A Step Towards Knowing God

In *Tetzaveh*, the Incense Altar is mentioned last, after all the other vessels and structures of the Mishkan. But perhaps this is because in *Terumah-Tetzaveh*, God's instructions are given from the perspective of His approach to us while the incense altar is entirely about our approach to Him. God commissioned the Mishkan because His cloud, His presence, was out of reach. **What He truly wants is to be close to us.** So in *Terumah*, God takes the first step. He tells us that He wants a home where His cloud can come down from the heavens to rest among us.

God's instructions detail the building of the Mishkan from inside out for this reason as well. God emphasizes the ark first. It is the place where His cloud will rest, and His presence will emanate outward to the Mishkan, and the rest of the camp.

But in *Parshat Vayakhel*, when the time comes to finally construct the Mishkan, the Torah repeats the details of the Mishkan from Israel's perspective.

Building the Tabernacle—Building a Relationship with God

Now, Israel, from the midst of their camp, is approaching God. They make their approach by building carefully and deliberately, from the outside-in. They come from the camp, building a space for God among them, and afterward, filling in its essence. For them, the incense altar is not an afterthought, it is part and parcel of their approach to God. It takes primacy and a deserved place amongst the rest of the vessels. Changing the order was our step toward meeting God.

The repetition in *Parshat Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* might not yield many new plot points to the reader who is looking for a story to capture their attention, but if you gloss over these *parshiyot*, you might miss the incredible poetry laden in every repeated word.

Terumah-Tetzaveh is God's love-letter to us, but *Vayakhel-Pekudei* is our reciprocation, our contribution, and our answer to him.

Join us next week as we wrap up the book of Exodus on the Parsha Experiment.

1. *The cloud isn't just some detail about the Mishkan, it seems to be its very purpose ... **God's glory filled the Mishkan.***

a. The "cloud" is a *physical, visible* manifestation of God's glory!—like the "Angel of the LORD" (whose "form" is more familiar to us).

In the same way HaShem spoke to Moses from "between the two cherubim (Exo 25:21), HaShem spoke to Moses through the burning bush (Exo 3:2-4). In the former instance it was through a "cloud"—in the second, it was through "flames of fire from within a bush."

But, we don't "worship" clouds or bushes—we worship God Who manifests His Presence in a variety of ways throughout the Bible.

b. Exodus 29:43

⁴³there also I will meet with the Israelites, and **the place will be consecrated by my glory.**

c. Leviticus 16:2

²The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For **I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.**

d. Numbers 9:15

¹⁵On the day the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant law, was set up, **the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire.**

e. 1Kings 8:11

¹¹And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for **the glory of the LORD filled his temple.**

f. 2Chronicles 5:13

¹³The trumpeters and musicians joined in unison to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, the singers raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever." Then **the temple of the LORD was filled with the cloud ...**

g. Revelation 15:8

⁸And **the (heavenly) temple was filled with smoke from the glory**

of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

h. Hebrews 1:1-3

¹In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. ³The Son **is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being**, sustaining all things by his powerful word ...

2. *God is not of this world, we associate Him with the heavens, and yet, at Sinai, in a great act of love and intimacy, **He appears in a cloud, and descends from the heavens, in a grand gesture of revelation.***

a. Exodus 29:45

⁴⁵Then **I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God.** ⁴⁶They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so **that I might dwell among them.** I am the LORD their God.

1) 2Corinthians 6:16

¹⁶What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For **we are the temple of the living God. As God has said:** "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and **they will be my people**" (Exo 29:45; Lev 26:12; Jer 32:38; Ezek 37:27).

a) Who is the "we" in v. 16? Israel or the Church? There is no question the passages Paul refers to are **a reference to God's relationship with His people Israel.**

So, who "joins" who? Are Jews who believe in Yeshua connected to a Church *or* are Gentiles who believe in Yeshua connected to Israel?

1) Romans 11:17-18

¹⁷If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, **have been grafted in among the (natural branches)** and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, ¹⁸do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.

2) Ephesians 2:12-13

¹²remember that at that time you (Gentiles) were separate from Messiah, **excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.** ¹³But now in Messiah Yeshua **you who once were far away have been brought near** by the blood of Messiah.

b. 1Kings 6:11-13

¹¹The word of the LORD came to Solomon: ¹²"As for this temple you are building, if you follow my decrees, observe my laws and keep all my commands and obey them, I will fulfill through you the promise I gave to David your father. ¹³And **I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon (forsake, leave) my people Israel.**"

¹⁴So Solomon built the temple and completed it.

c. Revelation 21:1-3

¹Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! **God's dwelling place is now among the people**, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and **God himself** will be with them and be their God.

3. *I am approaching you from the heavens, and descending into a special place in your camp. Because I want a relationship with you.*

a. John 1:1-18 (CJB)

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³All things came to be through him, and without him nothing made had being. ⁴In him was life, and the life was the light of mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not suppressed it ...

⁹This was the true light, which gives light to everyone entering the world. ¹⁰He was in the world—the world came to be through him—yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to his own homeland, yet his own people did not receive him. ¹²But to as many as did receive him, to those who put their trust in his person and power, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³not because of bloodline, physical impulse or human intention, but because of God.

¹⁴The Word became a human being and lived with us, and we saw his *Sh'khinah*, the *Sh'khinah* of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth ... ¹⁸No one has ever seen God; but the only and unique Son, who is identical with God and is at the Father's side—he has made him known.

1) Revelation 21:1-4 (CJB)

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had passed away, and the sea was no longer there. ²Also I saw the holy city, New Yerushalayim, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³I heard a loud voice from the

throne say, "See! **God's *Sh'khinah* is with mankind, and HE will live with them.** They will be his people, and **he himself, God-with-them, will be their God.** ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will no longer be any death; and there will no longer be any mourning, crying or pain; because the old order has passed away."

2) Exodus 33:17-20

¹⁷And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." ¹⁸Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." ¹⁹And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰But," he said, **"you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."**

3) *Shekinah* Glory is **a visible manifestation of God on earth**, whose presence is portrayed through a natural occurrence. The word *shekinah* is a Hebrew name meaning "dwelling" or "one who dwells." *Shekinah* Glory means "He caused to dwell," **referring to the divine presence of God.**²

The ... term *Shekinah* (is used) to describe the following ...

- (1) The presence of God amongst His people (Exo 19:16-18; Exo 40:34-38; 1Ki 6:13)
- (2) The glory of God dwelling in the Temple (2Chr 7:1)
- (3) How God dwells in the mountain (Psa 68:16-18; Joel 3:17)

The divine presence of God on earth is depicted through the following:

- (1) As a cloud (Exo 24:16-18; Exo 33:9; 1Ki 8:10-13)
- (2) As a pillar of smoke and fire (Exo 13:21-22)
- (3) As fire and a burning bush (Zech 2:5; Exo 3:2)

a) Judges 6:12-24

¹²When **the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon**, he said, "The LORD is with you, mighty warrior" ... ¹⁵"Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." ¹⁶**The LORD answered, "I will be with you**, and you will strike down all the Midianites" ... ¹⁷Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. ¹⁸Please do not go away until I

2 <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/christian-terms/what-is-the-meaning-of-shekinah-glory.html>

come back and bring my offering and set it before you."
And **the LORD said**, "I will wait until you return."

¹⁹Gideon went inside, prepared a(n offering) ... he brought them out and offered them to him under the oak.

²⁰The angel of God said to him ... ²¹Then the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread with the tip of the staff that was in his hand. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And **the angel of the LORD disappeared**. ²²When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the LORD, he exclaimed, "Alas, **Sovereign LORD! I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face!**"

²³But the LORD said to him, "Peace! **Do not be afraid. You are not going to die.**" ²⁴So **Gideon built an altar to the LORD** there and called it The LORD Is Peace ...

b) Judges 13:15-25

¹⁵Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you." ¹⁶The angel of the LORD replied, "Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But **if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD**" ... ¹⁹Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And **the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched**: ²⁰As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, **the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame**. Seeing this, **Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground**.

²¹When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. ²²"**We are doomed to die!**" he said to his wife. "**We have seen God!**" ²³But **his wife answered**, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this." ²⁴The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, ²⁵and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Machaneh Dan ...

4) Matthew 4:8-10

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹"All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰Yeshua said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: **'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'**" (Deu 6:13).

5) John 4:21-24

²¹"Woman," Yeshua replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²²You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for **salvation is from the Jews**. ²³Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴**God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.**"

6) Acts 24:10-14

¹⁰When the governor (Felix) motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense ... ¹²My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. ¹³And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. ¹⁴However, I admit that **I worship the God of our ancestors** as a follower of the Way, **which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets** ...

7) Revelation 14:6-7

⁶Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. ⁷He said in a loud voice, "**Fear God** and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. **Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.**"

8) Revelation 19:9-10

⁹Then the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" And he added, "These are the true words of God." ¹⁰At this **I fell at his feet to worship him**. But he said to me, "**Don't do that! I am a fellow servant** with you and with your brothers and sisters who hold to the testimony of Yeshua. **Worship God!** For it is the Spirit of prophecy who bears testimony to Yeshua."