# Paired Perspectives on the Parashah: Vayakhel

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**Introduction**

The narrative arc of the Tabernacle reaches its culmination in Vayakhel. What began with the divine blueprints in Parashat Terumah now becomes a human achievement. The Torah lingers over the construction with remarkable detail, signaling that something essential is being revealed—not only about Israel's worship, but about Israel's relationship with God and the world.

Two complementary perspectives illuminate the meaning and purpose of the Tabernacle. One views it as a portable continuation of Sinai—revelation institutionalized and made ongoing. The other reads the Tabernacle as a recreation of Creation and the Garden of Eden—a sacred space in which humanity is invited back into God's presence. Seen together, these perspectives frame the Tabernacle as the fulfillment of God's purposes in history.

**Perspective I — The Tabernacle as Sinai Redux**

Ramban argues that the Tabernacle is the perpetuation of the Sinaitic theophany. In his commentary to Exodus (25:2), Ramban writes that Israel was commanded to construct a sanctuary so that the revelatory experience of Sinai might continue among them in permanent form. The cloud, the fire, and the divine speech—all

elements of the original revelation—reappear within the sanctuary. What Israel had witnessed briefly at Sinai would now accompany them in their journeys.

Ramban reinforces the Sinai parallel through close attention to textual sequence. The spatial structure reinforces this point: the summit of Sinai corresponds to the *Kodesh ha-Kodashim*, accessible only to Moses (or later the High Priest); the middle zone corresponds to the *Kodesh*, for elders and priests; the base corresponds to the courtyard, where the altar stands. In both settings, God descends and speaks from the sacred center.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks cited Max Weber's insight that transformative charismatic events survive only when they are routinized—translated into enduring institutions and practices. Sinai was unparalleled, but it was also ephemeral. Its survival required the regular rhythms of commanded worship.

In his introduction to Exodus, Ramban adds one more layer: the Tabernacle completes the redemption from Egypt. Redemption is not fulfilled by liberation alone but by God dwelling among Israel, restoring them to the spiritual stature of the Patriarchs, with whom the Divine Presence rested continuously. Revelation becomes residence; Sinai becomes home.

**Perspective II — The Tabernacle as Creation and Eden Redux**

Another set of sources views the Tabernacle not through the lens of Sinai but through the lens of Creation and Eden. The Tabernacle stabilizes the world and invites humanity back into sacred space.

A remarkable Midrash (*Numbers Rabbah* 12:12–13) teaches that the world was like a two-legged stool until the Tabernacle was erected, and only then did it stand firm. Creation itself, the Midrash implies, is incomplete until God's Presence dwells in the world through human action. The partnership between God and Israel brings the world to its intended stability.

The Torah reinforces the Creation parallel in narrative detail. When the construction is finished, "*Vayekhal Moshe et ha-melakhah*"—"Moses completed the work" (Exodus 40:33; cf. 39:32), echoing "*Vayekhulu ha-shamayim ve-ha-aretz*" at the end of Creation. Moses beholds the finished work and blesses it (39:42–43), as God does in Genesis. Vayakhel thus portrays human beings engaging in creative labor that mirrors God's creative labor.

The placement of Shabbat laws on either side of the Tabernacle narrative underscores the point. The command to build concludes with Shabbat (31:12–17), and the account of building begins with Shabbat (35:1–3). God created the world in six days and ceased on the seventh; Israel builds the Tabernacle and refrains on the seventh. The categories of prohibited labor on Shabbat derive from Tabernacle work (Shabbat 49b), demonstrating that sacred human creativity is bounded by sacred restraint.

A final set of texts extends the analogy from Creation to Eden. Humanity's ideal state was to remain with God in the Garden, obeying His command. Sin led to exile, and God stationed cherubim to guard the way to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22–24). In the Tabernacle, cherubim reappear—this time not as guardians against intrusion but as symbols of Divine Presence above the Tablets of the Torah, which becomes a new Tree of Life. The sanctuary thereby becomes a realized Edenic space, inviting all humanity—through Israel—to fulfill their potential as bearers of God's image.

Other Midrashim reinforce the theme. *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* locates Eden's opening at Moriah (Temple Mount in Jerusalem), linking primordial sacred geography to Jerusalem. Eden thus migrates from Mesopotamia to Zion, and exile gives way to return.

**Conclusion — Revelation Institutionalized, Creation Completed**

Seen through these two lenses, the Tabernacle accomplishes a double transformation. It converts the unrepeatable revelation of Sinai into a sustained relationship mediated through discipline, routine, and commanded worship. And it completes creation by enabling humanity to participate in its perfection, returning to the sacred space from which it once departed.

The Tabernacle therefore belongs not only to the story of Israel but to the story of the world. Revelation, creation, and redemption converge in the sanctuary. In Vayakhel, Israel learns not only to receive God’s gifts but to build a world in which God’s Presence can dwell.