

# Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Vayakel 5785

D. Mordechai Schlachter

After much instruction, the Mishkan is built.

וַיַּעַשׂ בְּצִלְאֵל אֶת־הָאָרֹן עֲצֵי שִׁטִּים אֲמָתִים וַחֲצִי אַרְכּוֹ וְאֲמָה וַחֲצִי רָחְבּוֹ וְאֲמָה וַחֲצִי קִמְתּוֹ:

“And Betzalel constructed the acacia wood Aron, two and half cubits long, a cubit and half wide, and a cubit and half tall.” (Shmos 37:1).

Hashem commanded Moshe that “they will make” the Aron. (Ibid 25:10). Yet, the Torah continues and says, “you will make” its staves (ibid 25:13), its cover (ibid 25:17), the two cherubim (ibid 25:18). “You shall make the table...” (ibid 25:23) and “you shall make the Menorah” (ibid 25:31). Why is the Aron made by “them” but the rest are made by “you?” Also, Betzalel made them all. (Ibid 37). How does the instruction in perek 25 fit with the construction of perek 37? Also, of all wood, why acacia wood?

Hashem commanded Noach to build a gofer wood ark. (Bereishis 6:14). The Torah says, תִּבְנֶה עֲצֵי־גֹפֶר “a gopher wood ark.” It does not say “an ark from gopher wood.” Here, too, it is not an Aron from acacia wood. But it is an acacia wood Aron. Moshe also calls the Aron the wooden Aron. “Hashem said to me, ‘Carve out two tablets like the first, and come up to Me upon the mountain; and you will make a wooden Aron.’” (Devarim 10:1). The Aron was covered in gold. (Shmos 25:11; 37:2). Why did Moshe call it the wooden Aron?

The similarity between the ark of Noach and the Aron was that both were to be made of wood and then covered in something else. They both were protecting what is most important. And they were both made by giving instruction in cubit measurements. The Torah rarely gives definitive instruction. The recipe for the ketores is not written, the dimensions of the Luchos are not given, and the particulars of what a talis and tefillin look like are left unrecorded. The dimensions of the Mishkan and all its vessels are given, but are given in the most unspecific measurement. True, the world did not use feet or meters at the time. However, the actual size of the cubit is disputed. Therefore, even today, the exact measurements of the Mishkan remains unknown. The Aron was anywhere from 2.25 feet to 3 feet wide and tall, and 3.75 feet to 5 feet tall. As stated earlier, the cherubim were given in very little detail. The Torah talks about its wings and its face but not if they had four faces and four wings, plus arms and a human body, as described by Yechezkel. Further, the embroidery is given in colors and materials but not how much blue versus how much scarlet and how much purple. The actual designs and stitching are not given. Thus, while the Torah appears to be very specific in repeating the measurements of the Mishkan, one cannot replicate them with 100% confidence today.

This is by design. Instruction was given by Hashem and man was to do the best he could. The Torah gave the instructions to Moshe on how to build the Mishkan. Instead of writing “and Betzalel did all that he was commanded” the Torah goes into detail how

Betzalel followed Moshe's instructions. Why is the entire construction of the Mishkan repeated? The Torah is meant for human beings. Hashem instructs and humans have to carry it out. If the Torah was specific then any error would make it invalid. By giving measurements in cubits, Moshe could construct it in his own cubits and the Mishkan would be valid. While the Torah could have said that Betzalel followed the instructions, it states that he made them in the same cubit dimensions. However, Betzalel and Moshe may have had a different cubit measurement.

To digress, both Moshe and Betzalel were divinely inspired. Moshe was shown the instructions on Har Sinai. (Ibid 25:40). Betzalel was endowed with special divine inspiration, too. (Ibid 36:1). Further, Betzalel did not work alone. He worked with Oholiav and "every skilled person who Hashem endowed with skill." (Ibid 36:2). Thus, when it says "Betzalel made" it means he and his team did so.

The Aron was the central vessel of the Mishkan. Its instruction was given first; it was first constructed from all the vessels; and it was placed first and the remaining parts of the Mishkan were then set up around it. It was covered in gold for appearances. However, as Moshe taught, it really was just an acacia wood Aron. It is not an Aron made from acacia wood. Its core—literally and figuratively—is that it is a box of acacia wood.

Acacia wood is found readily in the wilderness. However, Bnei Yisroel also had access to palms. (Ibid 15:27). They would, perhaps, be more suitable for making the long poles—kerushim—of the Mishkan. However, acacia was chosen because of its characteristics. It is from a similar species and family of gopher wood. As we stated (in Noach 5784) gopher wood is most likely a form of Kopje tree. It is similar to acacia. They are both very tall but gnarled. Their trunks are long and thick but they grow twisted. They are meant for desert life. They can live on little water and they can withstand heavy sandstorms. The ark that carried mankind and the Aron that carried the Luchos shel Bris were both to be made from a similar species of tree. Not easily constructed by cedar planks or oak that are strong and long. Instead, the vessels would be made by making smaller plants into larger items.

The Aron was for the Luchos, the symbol of the Torah and the covenant that Hashem made with His people. It was for everyone's sake. The Torah is not just for some people but for the entire nation. All of the vessels were for the entire nation. However, nothing unified the nation more and nothing is needed every minute of every day than the Torah. Those not hungry do not need the Shulchan. Those sleeping do not need the Menorah, per se. If not bringing a korban that day, the mizbeach is not needed that moment by that person. However, the Torah is needed always. It is central and it is core. Therefore, the Aron had to be made by everyone. "They shall make the Aron." It has to be an acacia wood Aron because while one person can alloy the gold, it takes many people to form the planks and construct the box. It is an acacia wooden box, a box of resilience and communal participation. The gold was just for shine just as the tar was just for waterproofing Noach's ship.

Further, the Aron was not an even measurement. It was half cubits. This is because it requires another half to make it whole. By itself it is just a box. With the Torah and people following the Torah it is a full and useful vessel.