THE USE OF *MIŠKĀN* AND
ʾŌHEL MÔʿĒḎ IN EXODUS 25-40

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The previous study[1] in this series on *miškān* and *ʾōhel môʿēḏ* in Exod 25-40 concluded that *miškān* means "dwelling place," that it concerns a "place" or "site" (similar to the modern noun "camp"), and that it carries connotations of transience. It should not be limited to a specific form or kind of "dwelling" (particularly not what is implied by the English word "tent" and by the Latin *tabernaculum*), since such a usage leads to confusion with *ʾōhel*. Regarding the phrase *ʾōhel môʿēḏ* we found that it is a genitival construct which means "tent of assembly" or "tent of encounter," that this was the name of the structure in which the Divine and the human met, and that the term emphasizes the event rather than the structure.

The previous study further revealed that Ugaritic parallels to these two Hebrew terms provide no additional helpful information beyond what is already known from the Hebrew itself, except possibly that the Hebrew differentiation between nonsedentary and sedentary connotations of the words seems to be lost in the Ugaritic. I suggested that the reason for this difference in usage could be the fact that Ugarit was sedentary and urban at the time the literature we examined was written (MB III [II C] to LB I), whereas Israel was nonsedentary during the period depicted in the book of Exodus.

Finally, we found that by translating both *miškān* (dwelling place) and *ōhel* (tent) as *skēnē* (tent), the LXX has obscured the difference between the two Hebrew terms, as does the Vulgate in its use of *tabernaculum*. I suggested that perhaps the two terms were considered to be synonyms by the time of the translation of the LXX, and that if so, this may be another example of sedentarization obscuring the terms.

Building upon this initial etymological analysis, subsequent study of the MT of Exod 25-40 has revealed that the expressions *miškān* and *ōhel môʿēd* are discrete and specific; they are not interchangeable. The term selected in each case depends on the literary context in which the term appears. *Miškān* is the biblical writer's expression of choice when the construction or assembling of the dwelling place is the subject, while *ōhel môʿēd* is the expression of choice when the context is cultic. Thus the habitation of YHWH may properly be called the "Cultic Dwelling Place," a phrase which conveys both aspects of this duality.

Both past and contemporary structural analyses of Exod 25-40 lack sensitivity to the distinctions between *miškān* and *ōhel môʿēd*.[2] This may be due to the application of an external methodology

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[2]Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 73, cf. 100; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 353, 371 (for examples of scholarly analyses, see pp. 350-499); and George V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), xvii. On terminological insensitivity, see (chronologically): Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 44; Baruch A. Levine, "The Descriptive Tabernacle Texts of the Pentateuch," *JAOS* 85 (1965): 307-318; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 346, 370; R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 52; Charles L. Feinberg, "Tabernacle," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 5:572-573; P. J. Kearney, "Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25-40," *ZAW* 89 (1977): 386; Joe O. Lewis, "The Ark and the Tent," *RevExp* 74 (1977): 537; Victor (Avigdor) Hurowitz, "The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle," *JAOS* 105 (1985): 22; John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 255; Durham, ix-x; Pixley, 195; W. Johnstone, *Exodus*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), *passim*; Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), esp. 263-316; and Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), esp. 49, 158, 176.

rather than making use of a literary-structural analysis.[3] Under these circumstances, a terminologically sensitive analysis of Exod 25-40 is timely. The present study is an endeavor to fill this vacuum for Exod 25-40. A third (and concluding) article will present an overview of the literary structure of Exod 25-40, through which this terminological pattern weaves.[4]

1. *Occurrences of the Terms*

Statistical Analysis

Miškān and *ʾōhel* (most often in the phrase *ʾōhel mōʿēd*) are names of YHWH's habitation which the text of Exod 25-40 indicates Moses was commanded to construct, equip, and ceremonially prepare for service. Other appellative expressions for this habitation either do not occur in chapters 25-40 or occur only once, whereas *miškān* and *ʾōhel* occur in reference to the habitation some fifty-eight times each.[5] The present study will be limited to the contextual usage of these two denominatives.

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[3]By "external methodology" is meant the type popularized by Julius Wellhausen in his *Prolegomena*, and summarized by Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 55-61. This method has mutated through time (see Douglas A. Knight, "The Pentateuch," in *The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], 265-287), but still retains at least one essential Wellhausian theme: namely, the etiological nature of the Cultic Dwelling Place of YHWH (Wellhausen, 37: "For the truth is, that the tabernacle is the copy, not the prototype, of the temple in Jerusalem"). On this matter, see also (chronologically): J. Coert Rylaarsdam, "Introduction to the Book of Exodus," *IB* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952) 1:845; idem, "Exegesis of the Book of Exodus," *IB* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1952), 1:1027; James Muilenberg, "The History of the Religion of Israel," *IDB*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 308-309; Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, trans. J. S. Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 211; Jack P. Lewis, "Moʿed," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:389; Durham, 352; and Johnstone, 63.

[4]Ralph E. Hendrix, "A Literary-Structural Overview of Exod 25-40," *AUSS* (forthcoming).

[5]All statistical data are derived from Gerhard Lisowsky and Leonhard Rost, *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1958). *Hēkāl* (palace, temple) does not occur in Exod 25-40. *Miqdāš* (holy precinct), and *Bayit* (house) in reference to the divine dwelling, each occurs only once, in Exod 25:8 and 34:26 respectively.

The word *miškān* (dwelling place) occurs 139 times in the OT. Of these occurrences, 104 (74.8%) are found in the Pentateuch as follows: fifty-eight (55.8%) in Exodus, four (3.9%) in Leviticus, and forty-two (40.4%) in Numbers, with none in Genesis and Deuteronomy. Every occurrence of *miškān* in Exodus (41.7% of all OT occurrences) are found in Exod 25-40.

The word *ōhel* (tent) occurs 344 times in the OT. In the Pentateuch it is found 214 times in one or another of the expressions *ōhel* (tent), *ōhel môʿēd* (tent of meeting), *ōhel ʿal-hāmiškān* (tent over the dwelling place), and *ōhel hāʿēdut* (tent of the testimony). It is used in the Pentateuch to refer to a personal tent forty-seven times (13.7%), with all twenty-three occurrences in Genesis (6.7%) being of this nature. It occurs forty-four times in Leviticus, forty-three (97.7%) of which are in the phrase *ōhel môʿēd*. In Numbers, it occurs seventy-six times, of which fifty-six (73.7%) are in the phrase *ōhel môʿēd*. Deuteronomy has nine occurrences, four times (45.4%) either in the phrase *ōhel môʿēd* or with this phrase as its antecedent.

In Exodus *ōhel* without an antecedent appears four times (6.5%). It occurs in the phrase *ōhel môʿēd* thirty-four times, plus three more times with *ōhel môʿēd* as its antecedent, for a total of thirty-seven occurrences (59.7% of its Exodus occurrences). It is found in the phrase *ōhel ʿal-hāmiškān* two times, but with twelve more occurrences with *ōhel* in reference to *ōhel ʿal-hāmiškān*, for a total of fourteen times (22.5% of the total Exodus occurrences). In Exod 33 it is found seven times as the *ōhel* of Moses (11.3% of the Exodus occurrences). *Ōhel hāʿēdut* (tent of the testimony) does not occur in Exodus. Thus, in one form or another *ōhel* occurs a total of sixty-two times in Exod 25-40 (29.1% of its OT occurrences). There are fifty-eight times in Exod 25-40 wherein some form of *ōhel* refers to the habitation of YHWH, the most common being thirty-four occurrences in the phrase *ōhel môʿēd*.

The Patterning of the Occurrences

A sequential listing of the occurrences of *miškān* and *ōhel môʿēd* in Exod 25-40 reveals a terminological pattern.[6] The data in

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[6]This is S. Bar-Efrat's "verbal level," as suggested in "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative," *VT* 30 (1980): 157.

the **Table** on page 8 (derived from Lisowsky and Rost)[7] make it apparent that the use of *miškān* continues uninterrupted (nineteen times) from Exod 25:9 through 27:19. Then in Exod 27:20, the beginning of a second terminological unit is evidenced by an abrupt shift to *ʾōhel môʿēd*, a term which continues through to Exod 33:7 (seventeen occurrences in all).[8] In Exod 35:1-39:43 we find a third termi-nological unit, one that is "predominantly *miškān*." In it, *miškān* occurs twenty-two times while *ʾōhel môʿēd* occurs five times. Finally, a fourth terminological unit constitutes a "mixed" *miškān* and *ʾōhel môʿēd* passage encompassing Exod 40:1-38. Here *miškān* occurs seventeen times and *ʾōhel môʿēd* twelve times.

The terminological structure of *miškān* and *ʾōhel môʿēd* in Exod 25-40 consists therefore of four compositional units: *miškān* only, *ʾōhel môʿēd* only, predominantly *miškān*, and mixed *miškān* and *ʾōhel môʿēd* expressions. Why is this so?

2. *Explanations and Solutions*

Among the scholarly analyses noted, only that of G. V. Pixley acknowledges a terminological aspect of the text. He does so, however, only once and without explanation.[9] I suggest that it is the literary context in which each of these expressions is used that provides the key to understanding the terminological structure. A broad study of the literary structure of Exod 25-40 will be presented in a forthcoming article; however, the overview that will be given therein is not necessary in order for us to analyze here the contextual usages of *miškān* and *ʾōhel môʿēd*.[10]

"Miškān *Only" Terminological Unit* (Exod 25:9-27:19)

Miškān (occurring nineteen times) is the only term used to name the habitation of YHWH in the text of Exod 25:9-27:19. This

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[7]Lisowsky and Rost, 30-33, 873-874.

[8]Pixley, 199.

[9]See specific references in Cole, Durham, Fretheim, Hurowitz, Johnstone, Kearney, Joe O. Lewis, Noth, and Rylaarsdam mentioned in n. 2, above. See also Pixley, 199, and Sarna, 176, regarding the shift from *miškān* to *ʾōhel môʿēd* in Exod 27:19-20.

[10]This article is scheduled for publication in the next issue of *AUSS*.

Occurrences of *Miškān* and *ʾŌhel Môʿēd* in Exodus 25-40

Miškān	ʾŌhel Môʿēd	Miškān	ʾŌhel Môʿēd
"Miškān Only"		**"Predominantly Miškān"**	
25:9		35:11	
26:1		:15	
:6		:18	35:21
:7		36:8	
:12		:13	
:13		:14	
:15		:20	
:17		:22	
:18		:23	
:20		:25	
:22		:27	
:23		:28	
:26		:31	
:27		:32	
:27		:32	
:30			38:8
:35		38:20	
27:9		:21	
:19		:21	
			:30
		:31	
		39:32	:32
		:33	
		:40	:40
"ʾŌhel Môʿēd Only"		**Mixed Terminology**	
	27:21	40:2	:2
	28:43	:5	
	29:4	:6	:6
	:10		:7
	:11	:9	
	:30		:12
	:32	:17	
	:42	:18	
	:44	:19	
	30:16	:21	
	:18	:22	:22
	:20	:24	:24
	:26		:26
	:36	:28	
	31:7	:29	:29
	33:7		:30
	:7		:32
		:33	
		:34	:34
		:35	:35
		:36	
		:38	

passage is part of a slightly larger section (Exod 25:1-27:19), the content of which consists of commands for constructing the dwelling: its size, pattern, and materials. This section also details the physical arrangements of the dwelling: an ark (throne), a table (for eating), a lampstand (for light), an audience chamber and private compartment, an altar (kitchen), and a courtyard (public area). All of these elements were common to dwellings in general, and thus the writer's use of *miškān* is not surprising.

"ʾŌhel Mō ʿēḏ Only" Terminological Unit
(Exod 27:20-34:35)

In Exod 27:20, there is a change of context which witnesses an abrupt shift in denominatives. Exod 27:21 contains the first instance of the use of the term *ʾōhel mô ʿēḏ*. This phrase, which occurs seventeen times, is used exclusively for the divine habitation in Exod 21:20-33:7.

Whereas the literary context of *miškān* was about construction, the literary context of *ʾōhel mô ʿēḏ* appears to involve the function of the cult of YHWH. Exod 27:20-21 concerns the cultic function and use of oil in the liturgy. Exod 28:1-43 concerns the priests, their garments (ephod, breastpiece, robe, turban, tunic, and under-garments), along with the time and manner of their function in the cult. Exod 29:1-46 describes the process of consecrating and dressing the priests. It also speaks of offerings (sin, burnt, and wave); ordination; and the continuous, "daily" burnt offering. Exod 30:1-10 concerns the incense altar: its placement, use, and perpetuity, but these verses do not give evidence of either name for YHWH's habitation. Exod 30:11-31:18 concerns atonement money, the priests' wash basin, the anointing oil, incense, the providential provision of craftsmen, and the sabbath(s). Where an expression naming the habitation of YHWH is found in each of these literary subsections of Exod 27:20-33:7, the term is exclusively *ʾōhel mô ʿēḏ*. In this cult-functional context, the biblical writer chose *ʾōhel mô ʿēḏ* rather than the previously used *miškān*.

Because of the cult-functional use of *ʾōhel mô ʿēḏ*, this phrase continues into the four narratives of Exod 32-34. It occurs twice in Exod 33:7, in the narrative of the Theophany in Moses' Tent. In the preceding narrative about the Golden Calf and in the subsequent two narratives about the Theophany on the Mountain and the Episode of the Second Tablets, the phrase does not occur. Thus, although the phrase is used only twice, and this in conjunction

with only the second narrative, all four narratives are apparently cultic and may be considered as being in a cult-functional context.

Predominantly Miškān *Terminological Unit*
(Exod 35:1-39:43)

The suggested term-context association seen in the first two terminological units appears straightforward. Individual expressions are used in clearly definable literary contexts. However, the two mixed terminological units found in Exod 35:1-39:43 and 40:1-38 provide both a challenge to, and vindication of, the term-context relationship suggested in this study. We find within the literary structure of Exod 35:1-39:43 that *miškān* occurs twenty-two times, while *ʾōhel môʿēd* occurs five times. For convenience, it is designated as a "predominantly *miškān*" terminological unit.

Exod 35:1-36:7 relates to the construction of the equipment of the habitation (which explains the presence *miškān*), but it also includes the mention of the cult function (hence the presence of *ʾōhel môʿēd* in Exod 35:21). *Miškān* is used three times in the construction context; *ʾōhel môʿēd* occurs once, in a cult-function context.

Exod 36:8-38:20 is an "assembly" passage which parallels the "command" passage in Exod 25:8-31:18. It primarily concerns construction. Thus the writer uses *miškān*, except in Exod 38:8, where the concern is cult-functional (necessitating the use of *ʾōhel môʿēd*). *Miškān* is used thirteen times, in construction contexts; and *ʾōhel môʿēd* is used once, in a cult-function context.

Exod 38:21-31 concerns the metal used in constructing components of the habitation. Here *miškān* occurs three times in construction contexts, and *ʾōhel môʿēd* occurs once in the context of the bronze altar. This is the altar of burnt offering (the incense altar was gold) and may be considered as cult-functional.

Finally, Exod 39:1-43, the "assembly" parallel to the Exod 28:1-43 "command" section, concerns the priestly garments, ephod, stones, breastpiece, robe, tunic, and plate/turban. Here, however, the emphasis is not on the cultic function of this equipment, but on its construction.

Apparent exceptions to this construction context are Exod 39:32 and 39:40, where both *miškān* and *ʾōhel môʿēd* are found in the same literary phrase. The two verses are worded in the Hebrew in such a way as to be rendered in English as "the dwelling place of

the Tent of Assembly."[11] Here the context is still construction: namely, the construction of the dwelling place of the Tent of Meeting. Up to this point, *miškān* has been used solely in reference to YHWH's Dwelling Place. But just as *ʾōhel* can refer to other tents besides YHWH's, so too can *miškān* simply mean a "dwelling place." Here it is consistent with the previous differentiation of terms for *miškān* to mean "dwelling place" as a reference to the dwelling place of the *ʾōhel môʿeḏ*.

The Combined Miškān and ʾŌhel Môʿeḏ Context (Exod 40:1-38)

The fourth unit, Exod 40:1-38, exemplifies the combined *miškān* and *ʾōhel môʿēḏ* context. Here *miškān* occurs seventeen times and *ʾōhel môʿēḏ* twelve times. The terminological distinction is much more narrow (as an "assembly" context might require); however, the same constructional and cult-functional usages are detectable.

Exod 40:1-8 concerns the assembling of the whole Cult-Dwelling from component parts. Although the cult articles are mentioned, this is in the context of construction. Hence *miškān* occurs once as the Dwelling Place of YHWH, and it also occurs twice as the "dwelling place" of the Tent of Meeting (in genitival construct). *ʾŌhel môʿēḏ* occurs alone only in Exod 40:7, in the context of the placement of the priests' wash basin—clearly a cultic object that pertains to cult-function.

Exod 40:9-16 concerns the command to anoint the *miškān*, its furnishings, the altar of burnt offerings and its utensils, and the wash basin and stand, as well as the priests. That this is clearly cult-functional (as the term "anoint" suggests) is verified by the presence of *ʾōhel môʿēḏ*. Here the command to anoint the *miškān* may seem troublesome unless one allows for its generic meaning "dwelling place." The apparent problem is resolved, however, if one reads *miškān* as the "dwelling place" of the Tent of Assembly, rather than as the "Dwelling Place" of YHWH.

Exod 40:17-33 concerns the placement of certain objects. *Miškān* is the primary term of the passage where it refers to the Dwelling

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[11]My translation. Exod 39:32 is simply a genitival construct wherein *miškān* is in the construct state and *ʾōhel môʿēḏ* is its genitive: "dwelling place of the Tent of Assembly." Exod 39:40 is not a genitival construct, but *ʾōhel môʿēḏ* is preceded by the dative prefix *lᵊ*, which may carry the genitival idea "of" and therefore retains the same meaning and translation in Exod 39:40 as in Exod 39:32.

Place of YHWH (v. 17) and the typical dwelling furniture therein (vv. 18-21). In vv. 22-24, a very close association of *miškān* and *ʾōhel* is witnessed; however, this is not in actual or effective genitival construct as before, but rather in a literary association with theological import: YHWH's dwelling furniture (table and lampstand) are placed in the structure that is called by its cult-functional name! This suggests that the act of placing the furniture was considered by the biblical writer to be cultic, not constructional. In other words, there is more to the placing of this particular furniture than merely mimicking what is done with household furniture. The text, in mid-sentence, explicitly unites the constructional and cult-functional aspects of the Cult-Dwelling: YHWH both dwells and conducts cultic placement of furniture in a single physical structure. Thus there is one structure with two aspects.

In v. 29, the same genitival construct relationship is witnessed as before: "the dwelling place of the Tent of Meeting," a construction context. In vv. 30-32, straightforward cult-functional contexts (concerning the washing of the priests) use *ʾōhel môʿēd* without difficulty for the reader. Finally, in v. 33, the writer switches back to *miškān* in the constructional context of putting up the curtain around the courtyard.

Exod 40:34-38, the final passage of Exod 25-40, exhibits the closest literary relationship between *miškān* and *ʾōhel môʿēd* found in this study up to this point. Here the subject is the indwelling of YHWH in the Cult-Dwelling. As one might expect in the light of YHWH's roles, the indwelling occurs simultaneously in the *miškān* and the *ʾōhel môʿēd*, since both are dual aspects of one single physical entity. The terms remain connotatively distinct while referring to the same physical structure. The Glory of YHWH resides inside the *miškān*, while the Cloud hovers above the entrance of the *ʾōhel môʿēd*.

3. *Summary and Conclusions*

Four terminological units occur within the basic literary structure of Exod 25-40. This terminological "axis" has generally been overlooked by scholars, resulting in an insensitivity to the discrete and separate connotations of *miškān* and *ʾōhel môʿēd*. By tracing the terms along the terminological axis through the literary structure, this study has suggested that *miškān* is used in constructional contexts, primarily associated with commands to

manufacture and assemble the Dwelling Place of YHWH, but secondarily in its generic sense as simply "dwelling place." The phrase *ʾōhel mōʿēḏ* appears in literary contexts where the cultic function of the habitation is the concern.

This relationship between the context and the precise term that is used suggests intentionality: i.e., particular terms are used in particular contexts. Specifically, what is suggested by the usage is that the biblical writer wished to associate *miškān* with construction contexts and *ʾōhel mōʿēḏ* with liturgical, cult-functional contexts. When writing about the command to construct a dwelling and to establish the cult, the writer could easily use the discrete terms separately. The writer dealt first with one subject (construction), and used an appropriately "constructional" name for the structure. In dealing with the second subject (cult-function), the writer used a totally distinct, but equally appropriate expression. We must realize that the writer was distinguishing dual, yet discrete, aspects of a single physical reality.

When describing the assembly process, these discrete denominatives are used in close association, but not necessarily synonymously. Even though the two terms occur at times in a single paragraph or sentence, it is always with discrete connotations. This is evident in the two terminological units where *miškān* and *ʾōhel mōʿēḏ* occur separately, and it is discernibly consistent in the latter two terminological units, where, in tightly-worded texts, the terms are in close association.

Thus, in all contexts within Exod 25-40 the biblical writer has masterfully controlled the use of *miškān* and *ʾōhel mōʿēḏ* in order to clarify the dual nature of YHWH's habitation. That habitation was to be understood as a transient dwelling place, such as was consistent with the dwelling places of nomadic peoples; therefore the choice of *miškān*. But yet, that habitation also had the continuing function of fostering the cultic relationship, and this aspect was best expressed by the choice of *ʾōhel mōʿēḏ*.