

5 parallels

In the Torah's description of the final steps to the completion of the Tabernacle, the language in Exodus finds parallels with the language of the creation story told in Genesis (see below). Thus the text conveys the message that building the Tabernacle is a human imitation of the creative work of God. Reflect on this: how sacred places are more than bricks and mortar; and how the material details of our human efforts can be charged with sacred meaning.

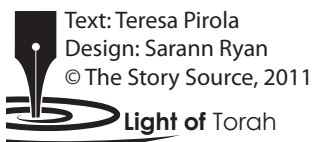
In Genesis God completes the creation of the world.

1. "The heaven and earth were finished, and all their array" (Gen. 2:1).
2. "And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good" (Gen. 1:31).
3. "And God blessed the seventh day" (Gen. 2:3).
4. "God finished the work that He had been doing" (Gen. 1:2).
5. As the Tabernacle is erected (Exod. 40:17-34), the phrase "as the Lord had commanded" is repeated 7 times, reflecting the 7 days of creation.

In Exodus the Israelites complete the Tabernacle.

- "Thus was completed all the work of the Tabernacle..." (Exod. 39:32).
- "And when Moses saw that they had performed all the tasks—as the Lord had commanded..." (Exod. 39:43).
- "Moses blessed them" (Exod. 39:43).
- "When Moses had finished the work..." (Exod. 40:33).

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Light of Torah

Ancient texts, through fresh eyes, alive for today.



Why reflect on Torah?

"The Church of Christ discovers its 'links' with Judaism 'by pondering its own mystery' (see *Nostra Aetate*, 4). The Jewish religion is not 'extrinsic' to us, but in a certain manner, it is 'intrinsic' to our religion. We have therefore a relationship with it which we do not have with any other religion."

- John Paul II
Synagogue of Rome (1986)

From the time of the Second Vatican Council, and despite occasional setbacks, the Catholic Church has repeatedly affirmed the profound links that exist between Judaism and Christianity. It does so in the knowledge that, as a Jew, Jesus' life and teachings were firmly rooted in Torah.

"Torah" is a Hebrew word meaning 'teaching, instruction'. In its specific sense, it refers to the first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. These books come to us through the faith and life of the Jewish people who continue to engage with their sacred texts. Millennia of Jewish biblical interpretation has much to teach us. The *Light of Torah* series draws on this wisdom as it invites Catholics to engage, week by week, with the books of the Torah.

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Exodus 38:21—40:38

Perkudei:
'records [of]'



Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

Exodus 38:21—40:38

Our Torah portion this week concludes the book of Exodus. According to the text (40:2), it is now one year after the Israelites came out of Egypt and the Israelites have just completed the building of the Tabernacle.

Our reflections this week are drawn from the whole Torah portion, so we invite you to read all 91 verses. (Should a group require a shorter passage, read: Exod. 39:32-43 and 40:17-19.)

Tasting Torah

It takes about 13 minutes to read this week's entire Torah portion at a leisurely pace. Set aside time for this. Read aloud. Resist the urge to skim the text. Sink yourself into God's Word, attentive to its rhythms and repetitions, so essential to ancient storytelling customs. Do the intricate descriptions of material items work on your thought patterns? Do you notice the colors of those yarns, the name of each precious stone...? Does any detail in particular catch your attention? And if so, why? In the detail can you taste the immense importance and effort of building the Tabernacle? Does it remind you of a great work—involving countless details—in your own life?

Touching Torah

"As the Lord had commanded Moses." This phrase, like a drumbeat, punctuates the text 18 times. What is the effect of this repetition? At no place in this Torah portion are we allowed to forget that it is the Lord's desire and design that underlies all this complex human activity. The drumbeat keeps us focused on what is essential. It is a beat that we need to hear in our 21st century world. Our lives are filled with activity; perhaps activity of great importance. Yet to what avail are our efforts if we become lost in the detail, losing sight of our fidelity to the Lord's desires and commands? The drumbeat of the Torah anchors the rhythms of our daily work.

Depthing Torah

What else do you notice in the text? While the Israelites (i.e., all the people) bring the completed components to Moses, *he* (Moses) puts them all together. Does that puzzle you? Why would this collective effort suddenly become a one-man task? According to Jewish storytelling traditions (midrash) none of the Israelites knew how to assemble the pieces.

"So what did they do? Each took his finished piece of work to Moses, saying: 'here are the boards, here are the bolts'; and as soon as Moses beheld them, the Holy Spirit settled upon him and he set the Tabernacle up. You must not say that it was Moses who set it up, for miracles were performed with it and it rose of its own accord." [Ex. Rabbah 52, 4]

See how the midrash invites us to ponder a human effort from a spiritual perspective. Even a construction site is permeated by divine presence. A structural task is worthy of the language of miracles. We are reminded yet again that the Lord is deeply involved with his people, with their work of service in creating the Tabernacle, and with Moses, a faithful servant who is especially close to the Lord.

Doing Torah

- Describe a human/material event in your life where you saw God's hand at work.
- Share something of your efforts to stay focused on the Lord amidst the many busy activities that fill your life.



Faith & life

A parishioner shares:

"I try to punctuate my day with short prayer-pauses. E.g., I walk away from the desk and close my eyes for a moment; I might breathe in the Lord's love, or recite a biblical verse, or pause before a religious painting, or finger my wedding ring... A wise person once told me: Don't wait for the 'perfect' time to pray. Rather, take this brief moment and pray *now*. Of course, we need the longer, well-planned prayer times too. But small habits like these help keep me in touch with God during a busy work day."

Sources consulted: *Etz Hayim* (NY: JPS, 2001); Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (NY, 1995); Freedman & Simon, *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus* (NY, 1983). Scripture quotations: JPS.