

THE USE OF MISKAN AND 'OHEL MO'ED IN EXODUS 25-40

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The previous study¹ in this series on *miskan* and *'ohel mo'ed* in Exod 25-40 concluded that *miskan* 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 *'ohel*. Regarding the phrase *'ohel mo'ed* 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.

¹Ralph E. Hendrix, "Miskan and 'Ohel Mo'ed: Etymology, Lexical Definitions, and Extra-biblical Usage," *AUSS* 29/3 (1991):213-224. The author here wishes to express appreciation to J. Bjornar Storfjell, Richard M. Davidson, and Randall W. Younker, members of the faculty of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, for their patience in overseeing the preparation of this and related studies.

Finally, we found that by translating both *miskan* (dwelling place) and *'ohel* (tent) as *skene* (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 *miskan* and *'ohel mo'ed* are discrete and specific; they are not interchangeable. The term selected in each case depends on the literary context in which the term appears. *Miskan* is the biblical writer's expression of choice when the construction or assembling of the dwelling place is the subject, while *'ohel mo'ed* 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 *miskan* and *'ohel mo'ed*.² This may be due to the application of an external methodology

²Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 73, d. 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

Miskan and '*ohel* (most often in the phrase '*ohel mo'ed*) 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 *miskan* and '*ohel* 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.

³By "external methodology" is meant the type popularized by Julius Wellhausen in his *Prolegomena*, and summarized by Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Forcross 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: Forcross Press, 1981, 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, "Mo'ed," *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.

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

⁵All statistical data are derived from Gerhard Usowsky and Leonhard Rost, *Konkordanz zum Hebraischen Alten Testament* (Stuttgart Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1958). *Hekal* (palace, temple) does not occur in Exod 25-40. *Miqdas* (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 *miskan* (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 *miskan* in Exodus (41.7% of all OT occurrences) are found in Exod 25-40.

The word *'ohel* (tent) occurs 344 times in the OT. In the Pentateuch it is found 214 times in one or another of the expressions *'ohel* (tent), *'ohel mo'ed* (tent of meeting), *'ohel hamiskan* (tent over the dwelling place), and *'ohel ha'edut* (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 *'ohel mo'ed*. In Numbers, it occurs seventy-six times, of which fifty-six (73.7%) are in the phrase *'ohel mo'ed*. Deuteronomy has nine occurrences, four times (45.4%) either in the phrase *'ohel mo'ed* or with this phrase as its antecedent.

In Exodus *'ohel* without an antecedent appears four times (6.5%). It occurs in the phrase *'ohel mo'ed* thirty-four times, plus three more times with *'ohel mo'ed* as its antecedent, for a total of thirty-seven occurrences (59.7% of its Exodus occurrences). It is found in the phrase *'ohel al-hamiskan* two times, but with twelve more occurrences with *'ohel* in reference to *'ohel al-hamiskan*, for a total of fourteen times (22.5% of the total Exodus occurrences). In Exod 33 it is found seven times as the *'ohel* of Moses (11.3% of the Exodus occurrences). *'Ohel ha'edut* (tent of the testimony) does not occur in Exodus. Thus, in one form or another *'ohel* 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 *'ohel* refers to the habitation of YHWH, the most common being thirty-four occurrences in the phrase *'ohel mo'ed*.

The Patterning of the Occurrences

A sequential listing of the occurrences of *miskan* and *'ohel mo'ed* in Exod 25-40 reveals a terminological pattern.⁶ The data in

⁶This 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 *miskan* 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 '*ohel mo'ed*, a term which continues through to Exod 33:7 (seventeen occurrences in all).⁸ In Exod 35:1-39:43 we find a third terminological unit, one that is "predominantly *miskan*." In it, *miskan* occurs twenty-two times while '*ohel mo'ed* occurs five times. Finally, a fourth terminological unit constitutes a "mixed" *miskan* and '*ohel mo'ed* passage encompassing Exod 40:1-38. Here *miskan* occurs seventeen times and '*ohel mo'ed* twelve times.

The terminological structure of *miskan* and '*ohel mo'ed* in Exod 25-40 consists therefore of four compositional units: *miskan* only, '*ohel mo'ed* only, predominantly *miskan*, and mixed *miskan* and '*ohel mo'ed* 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 *miskan* and '*ohel mo'ed*.¹⁰

"Miskan Only" Terminological Unit (Exod 25:9-27:19) I

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

⁷Lisowsky and Rost, 30-33, 873-874.

⁸Pixley, 199.

⁹See 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 *miskan* to '*ohel mo'ed* in Exod 27:19-20.

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

Occurrences of Miskan and 'Ohel Mo'ed in Exodus 25-40

Miskan 'Ohel Mo'ed	Miskan 'Ohel Mo'ed	
"Miskan Only"	"Predominantly Miskan"	
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
"Ohel Mo'ed 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 *miskan* is not surprising.

"*Ohel Mo'ed* 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 '*ohel mo'ed*'. This phrase, which occurs seventeen times, is used exclusively for the divine habitation in Exod 21:20-33:7.

Whereas the literary context of *miskan* was about construction, the literary context of '*ohel mo'ed*' 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 undergarments), 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 '*ohel mo'ed*'. In this cult-functional context, the biblical writer chose '*ohel mo'ed*' rather than the previously used *miskan*.

Because of the cult-functional use of '*ohel mo'ed*', 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 Miskan 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 *miskan* occurs twenty-two times, while *'ohel mo'ed* occurs five times. For convenience, it is designated as a "predominantly *miskan*" terminological unit.

Exod 35:1-36:7 relates to the construction of the equipment of the habitation (which explains the presence *miskan*), but it also includes the mention of the cult function (hence the presence of *'ohel mo'ed* in Exod 35:21). *Miskan* is used three times in the construction context; *'ohel mo'ed* 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 *miskan*, except in Exod 38:8, where the concern is cult-functional (necessitating the use of *'ohel mo'ed*). *Miskan* is used thirteen times, in construction contexts; and *'ohel ma'ed* is used once, in a cult-function context.

Exod 38:21-31 concerns the metal used in constructing components of the habitation. Here *miskan* occurs three times in construction contexts, and *'ohel mo'ed* 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 *miskan* and *'ohel mo'ed* 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, *miskan* has been used solely in reference to YHWH's Dwelling Place. But just as '*ohel*' can refer to other tents besides YHWH's, so too can *miskan* simply mean a "dwelling place." Here it is consistent with the previous differentiation of terms for *miskan* to mean "dwelling place" as a reference to the dwelling place of the '*ohel mo'ed*.'

The Combined Miskan and 'Ohel Mo'ed Context
(Exod 40:1-38)

The fourth unit, Exod 40:1-38, exemplifies the combined *miskan* and '*ohel mo'ed*' context. Here *miskan* occurs seventeen times and '*ohel mo'ed*' 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 *miskan* 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). '*Ohel mo'ed*' 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 *miskan*, 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 '*ohel mo'ed*'. Here the command to anoint the *miskan* may seem troublesome unless one allows for its generic meaning "dwelling place." The apparent problem is resolved, however, if one reads *miskan* 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. *Miskan* is the primary term of the passage where it refers to the Dwelling

¹¹My translation. Exod 39:32 is simply a genitival construct wherein *miskan* is in the construct state and '*ohel mo'ed*' is its genitive: "dwelling place of the Tent of Assembly." Exod 39:40 is not a genitival construct, but '*ohel mo'ed*' is preceded by the dative prefix l^c, 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 *miskan* and *'ohel* 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 *'ohel mo'ed* without difficulty for the reader. Finally, in v. 33, the writer switches back to *miskan* 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 *miskan* and *'ohel mo'ed* 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 *miskan* and the *'ohel mo'ed*, 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 *miskan*, while the Cloud hovers above the entrance of the *'ohel mo'ed*.

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 *miskan* and *'ohel mo'ed*. By tracing the terms along the terminological axis through the literary structure, this study has suggested that *miskan* 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 '*ohel mo'ed*' 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 *miskan* with construction contexts and '*ohel mo'ed*' 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 *miskan* and '*ohel mo'ed*' 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 *miskan* and '*ohel mo'ed*' 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 *miskan*. But yet, that habitation also had the continuing function of fostering the cultic relationship, and this aspect was best expressed by the choice of '*ohel mo'ed*'.

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