



By Jacques B. Doukhan

Biblical theology understood the Israelite Sanctuary as representative of the whole world that God created. The description of the construction of the Sanctuary in Exodus 25-40 parallels the narration of the creation of the world in Genesis 1:1-2:4. Both occur in seven stages and both end with the same technical phrase: “finished the work” (Gen. 2:2; Ex. 40:33). The construction of the Temple by Solomon also takes place in seven stages and ends with the same words: “finished the work” (1 Kings 7:40, 51). The phrase appears only in these three passages of the Bible and clearly indicates the relationship between the Sanctuary-Temple and Creation. The psalms also attest to that connection: “He built the sanctuary like high mountains, like the earth that he established forever” (see Ps. 78:69; cf. 134:3; 150:1, 6).

In a way, Kippur reminds us, then, of the weekly Sabbath, evoking like that day the creation of the world (Ex. 20:11; cf. Gen. 2:1-3). Significantly, of all the festivals depicted in the book of Leviticus we find the book setting only these two, the Sabbath and the Day of Atonement, apart as a day when people are to “do no work,” as opposed to doing “no regular work” (Lev 23:3, 28, 35, etc.).

For the Israelite, Kippur symbolized the purification of the world, a true re-creation. This is why Daniel uses the expression “evenings and mornings” (Dan. 8:14), a phrase that occurs strictly in the context of Creation (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

Jewish tradition also associated the idea of Creation, like that of judgment, with the day of Kippur. The ancient Midrash, interpreting the first verses of Creation, declares: “There was an evening, and there was a morning, one day, this means that the Holy One, Blessed be He, gave them (Israel) one day, which is none other than the day of Kippur” (Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 4. 10.)

The prayers recited on Yom Kippur remind the believer that the God who judges is also the Creator who forgives. “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who opens the doors of Your grace and opens the eyes of those who wait for the forgiveness of Him who has created light and darkness, and all things” (*Yotser leyom*



*Kippur*). “How is the human to be just before his Creator, when he stands naked before Him?” (*Mosaph leyom Kippur*).

It is significant that the commandment of the Sabbath has been given in connection to the commandment of building the Sanctuary, and even intimately integrated with the various prescriptions concerning that construction. Thus the description of the work of the artisans of the Sanctuary (Ex. 31:1-11) is immediately followed by the prescription of the Sabbath as a sign of “perpetual covenant” (Ex. 12:12-18); likewise later in the same book the Sabbath regulation (Ex. 35:1-3) is immediately followed by the description of the offerings for the Sanctuary (Ex. 35:4-9).

This juxtaposition of the instructions to build the Sanctuary and the commandment of the Sabbath has struck the rabbis so much that they instituted the practice of the Sabbath in connection to the Sanctuary (*Shab.* 49b). Any work reminding of the works for the building of the Sanctuary was classified as biblically forbidden. The Mishnah gives a list of 39 main classes of such work (*Shab.* 7:2).

Whenever a religious Jew keeps the Sabbath, he should then remember the profound truth of the Sanctuary: the Sabbath just as the Sanctuary speaks about the Redemption of the world.