



## Exodus - Chapter Twenty Five

### II. Exodus 19:1-40:38 - The Covenant at Sinai (continues)

#### Summary of Chapter Twenty Five

God starts to reveal the design and contents for his Tabernacle that will be his sanctuary among the people until the Temple is built by Solomon in Jerusalem hundreds of years later. The people are to provide the precious materials that will be used to make the Tabernacle, its contents and the clothing for its priests. This chapter describes those offerings, the design and construction of the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of the Bread of the Presence, and the golden Lampstand.

#### II.d Exodus 25:1-31:17 - Instructions for the Tabernacle

The instructions for the tabernacle and the description of the instructions being carried out (35:4-40:38) make up the majority of the second half of the Book of Exodus. The Lord said of Israel: <<***I will take you as my people, and I will be your God***>> (Exodus 6:7), and the focus on the tabernacle is grounded in the fact that it is the means through which the Lord chose to dwell in the midst of his people. The level of detail in the instructions emphasises that Israel is to worship the Lord according to his word and that the materials, design, and layout of the tabernacle signify how Israel is to relate to the Lord, who is both holy and in their midst. For example, the objects inside the tabernacle where the Lord will meet with his people are made of or overlaid with pure gold, in contrast to the materials outside the tent, which are made of bronze and silver.

Although the instructions include a significant level of detail, the details are not exhaustive enough for the reader to be sure precisely how every aspect was to be made; Moses is repeatedly 'shown' how to make it (v.9). The inclusion of the details may also have been meant to ensure that any early Israelite hearing the

instructions read aloud would recognise that the tabernacle in their midst was indeed the one revealed to Moses, for him to oversee in construction.

At the same time, there are two important keys to understanding the symbolism of the tabernacle. First, the tabernacle is seen as a tented palace for Israel's divine king. He is enthroned on the Ark of the Covenant in the innermost Holy of Holies, also called the Most Holy Place. His royalty is symbolised by the purple of the curtains and his divinity by the blue. The closer items are to the Holy of Holies, the more valuable are the metals (bronze→silver→gold) of which they are made.

The other symbolic dimension is Eden. The tabernacle, like the Garden of Eden, is where God dwells, and various details of the tabernacle suggest it is a mini-Eden. These parallels include the east-facing entrance guarded by cherubim, the gold, the tree of life (lampstand), and the tree of knowledge (the law). Thus God's dwelling in the tabernacle was a step toward the restoration of paradise, which is to be completed in the new heaven and earth; refer to Revelation Chapters 21-22.

#### II.d.i Exodus 25:1-9 - Offerings for the Tabernacle

Israel's ability to make a contribution for the sanctuary was most likely possible through the precious metals and materials that the people brought out of Egypt according to the promise of the Lord; refer to 3:21-22, 11:2 and 12:35-36.

<sup>1</sup> The Lord said to Moses: <sup>2</sup> Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to give you shall receive the offering for me.

#### Exodus 25:1-2

Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering. Before God told Moses what the offering was for, he told Moses to take an offering. God wanted Israel to be motivated by a willing heart more than by a specific need. Giving should not be primarily because of need. It should be a heartfelt compulsion. God is a rich God and can use any method of providing he wants. Yet he usually uses the willing hearts of his people as the way to support his work.

**God is the most gracious and generous giver:** <<*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life*>> (John 3:16). Therefore, believers should give willingly, not because God or his church needs the money, but because they are in the likeness of God and are: <<*to be conformed to the image of his Son*>> (Romans 8:29b).

From all whose hearts prompt them to give. God only wanted contributions from those who gave willingly. God is not interested in coerced or manipulated giving. In the NT this idea is echoed in Paul's words: <<*now finish doing it, so that your*

*eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have>> (2 Corinthians 8:11-12), and: <<Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver>> (2 Corinthians 9:7).*

*Those who returned from Babylonian exile demonstrated this type of giving during the rebuilding of the temple: <<As soon as they came to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, some of the heads of families made freewill-offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site>> (Ezra 2:68), and: <<Now some of the heads of ancestral houses contributed to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand darics of gold, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priestly robes. And some of the heads of ancestral houses gave into the building fund twenty thousand darics of gold and two thousand two hundred minas of silver. And what the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand darics of gold, two thousand minas of silver, and sixty-seven priestly robes>> (Nehemiah 7:70-72).*

The offering did not belong to Moses, it did not belong to the elders, and it did not belong to Israel itself. God said you shall receive the offering for me. The offering belonged to God, and was held by Moses and the nation on God's behalf.

<sup>3</sup> This is the offering that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, <sup>4</sup> blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine linen, goats' hair, <sup>5</sup> tanned rams' skins, fine leather, acacia wood, <sup>6</sup> oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing-oil and for the fragrant incense, <sup>7</sup> onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and for the breastpiece.

#### Exodus 25:3-7

This is the offering that you shall receive from them. Each of these materials were used in building a structure God commanded Moses to build. Each of these materials has a symbolic or a spiritual representation relevant to the building. In the proportion of the finished tabernacle, the present day value of these materials total more than £8 million. Their combined weight would be almost 19,000 pounds or 8,600 kilos.

Blue. The dye for this colour was extracted from a shellfish, seemingly in several different hues.

Purple. The dye for this colour came from the murex snail. It was a purple-red colour.

Crimson. The dye for this colour came from the dried and powdered eggs and bodies of a particular worm. *coccus ilicis*, which attaches itself to the holly plant.

**Fine linen.** This term translates an Egyptian word. The Egyptians knew, and undoubtedly taught the Jews, how to make fine linen. Egypt excelled in the production of linen, especially twined linen, where every thread was twisted from many strands.

**Goat hair.** Coverings made from this material were typically black and coarse, similar to modern felt.

**Rams' skins.** This customarily had the wool removed and was like **fine leather.**

**Fine leather.** This difficult to translate phrase may refer to the skins of badgers, porpoises or manatees, i.e. the sea cow.

**Acacia wood.** This wood is harder and darker than oak. It is also very durable because wood-eating insects avoid it. Acacia is known to have been plentiful in Egypt, and it abounds in Arabian Desert, the very place in which Moses was when he built the tabernacle; and hence it is reasonable to suppose that he built it of that wood, which was every way proper for his purpose.

**The fragrant incense** was a special blend of spices that could only be used on God's altar: <<*The Lord said to Moses: Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (an equal part of each), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy*>> (Exodus 30:34-35).

**Onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and for the breastpiece.** These precious stones were to be used to decorate the clothing of the priests and were to be worn only when they came before God to offer sacrifice to him: <<*These are the vestments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a chequered tunic, a turban, and a sash. When they make these sacred vestments for your brother Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests*>> (Exodus 28:4).

<sup>8</sup> And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. <sup>9</sup> In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

#### **Exodus 25:8-9**

The purpose of **the Tabernacle** was to be the dwelling place of God. The idea was not that God exclusively lived in that place, but that it was the specific place where his people could come and meet with him. A **sanctuary** is a holy place, which, like the ground at the Burning Bush, is made holy by the Lord's presence (3:5). The presence of the Lord in Israel's midst will be borne out in the arrangement of the camp around the tabernacle; refer to Numbers 2:1-34.

In accordance with all that I show you. It is evident that God not only described the tabernacle and its furnishings to Moses, but also did show him something of its structure and arrangement. There was a vision that accompanied the giving of these words. The pattern of the tabernacle was according to a heavenly reality. It was a copy and shadow of the heavenly things; refer to Hebrews 8:5. Therefore, it had to be made according to exact dimensions, being somewhat of a ‘scale model’ of the area around God’s throne in heaven.

Israel is to follow the pattern for the Tabernacle exactly as the Lord shows Moses, (refer also to v.40, 26:30 and 27:8), both because the fear of the Lord is shown through fidelity to what he commands and also because the particulars of the sanctuary are meant to teach the people what it means to have a holy God dwell among them.

#### II.d.ii Exodus 25:10-22 - The Ark of the Covenant

The instructions for the sanctuary begin with the ark, (refer also to 37:1-9), which is God’s throne, from where he will meet and speak with Moses (v.22). The special function of the ark is borne out in several ways: its pieces are to be overlaid with or made of pure gold (vv.11-14 and vv.17-18); it will contain the testimony (v.16) that the Lord will give Moses, that is, the tablets of the Ten Commandments; and it is to be the only item in the Most Holy Place; refer to 26:33.

<sup>10</sup> They shall make an ark of acacia wood; it shall be two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. <sup>11</sup> You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside you shall overlay it, and you shall make a moulding of gold upon it all round.

#### Exodus 25:10-11



**The Ark of the Covenant**

The Ark of the Covenant, (refer also to 37:1-9), was the only piece of furniture in the Most Holy Place; the ark and its contents were kept hidden from view at all times. The ark itself was a wooden chest, overlaid with pure gold, measuring 3.75 feet long, 2.25 feet wide, and 2.25 feet high, or 1.1m x 0.7m x 0.7m. It contained within it the two stone tablets of the Testimony, i.e. the Ten Commandments. The author of Hebrews adds that it also contained <<*a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded*>> (Hebrews 9:4b).

The ark was not to be touched by human hands. Two wooden poles, overlaid with gold, were used to transport it and were not to be removed from the ark. The mercy seat, or atonement cover, was a solid golden slab that fitted perfectly on top of the ark. The golden cherubim, which were hammered out of the same piece of gold, had wings outstretched over the mercy seat and faces that looked downward in reverent awe. It was here, from between the cherubim, that God spoke to Moses, the representative of the people of Israel. Ancient iconography often depicts cherubim as having a lion-like body, wings, and a human face.

They shall make an ark. The first item God told Moses to build was the ark, later called the Ark of the Covenant. This was the most important single item associated with the tabernacle, modelled after the throne of God in heaven. The Ark of the Covenant was essentially a box, an ark is a box, not a boat. It was made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, 3 feet 9 inches long; 2 feet 3 inches wide; and 2 feet 3 inches high.

<sup>12</sup> You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on one side of it, and two rings on the other side. <sup>13</sup> You shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. <sup>14</sup> And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, by which to carry the ark. <sup>15</sup> The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. <sup>16</sup> You shall put into the ark the covenant that I shall give you.

#### Exodus 25:12-16

You shall cast four rings of gold for it. The Ark did not have handles and was not to be carried by lifting it directly in one's hands. Instead, it was to be carried by inserting gold-overlaid wooden poles into gold rings at each corner of the Ark.

The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. The poles were to remain inserted in the rings, and to be the only proper source of contact with the Ark. Apart from touching the poles, it was forbidden to touch the Ark of the Covenant. In 2 Samuel 6:6-7, Uzzah touched the Ark to keep it from falling off a cart but he did not touch it at the poles and God struck him dead.

Uzzah was wrong in his thinking that God would let the Ark be damaged; in fact, it did not fall off the cart. Uzzah was also wrong in his thinking that there was something less pure about the ground than his act of pure disobedience.

You shall put into the ark the covenant. God instructed Moses to put the covenant or testimony - that is, a copy of the law - into the Ark of the Covenant.

That I shall give you. God told Moses to build the Ark of the Covenant to hold the law even before the law was given. Later, God would instruct Israel to put other items into the Ark as well: *<<In it stood the golden altar of incense and the Ark of the Covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant>>* (Hebrews 9:4).

<sup>17</sup> Then you shall make a mercy-seat of pure gold; two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its width. <sup>18</sup> You shall make two cherubim of gold; you shall make them of hammered work, at the two ends of the mercy-seat. <sup>19</sup> Make one cherub at one end, and one cherub at the other; of one piece with the mercy-seat you shall make the cherubim at its two ends. <sup>20</sup> The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy-seat with their wings. They shall face each other; the faces of the cherubim shall be turned towards the mercy-seat. <sup>21</sup> You shall put the mercy-seat on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the covenant that I shall give you. <sup>22</sup> There I will meet you, and from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the Ark of the Covenant, I will deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites.

### Exodus 25:17-22

The mercy-seat, which formed the lid of the Ark, and the two cherubim were to be made of gold and fashioned as one piece, which would act as the cover for the Ark. The noun translated mercy-seat, Hebrew *kapporet*, may be related to the verb that typically has the sense 'to make atonement' (Hebrew *kipper*), and is thus sometimes translated as 'atonement cover.'

The instructions here focus on the fact that it is from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim that the Lord will speak to Moses; refer to also Numbers 7:89. For this reason, the Lord is sometimes referred to in the OT as being 'enthroned' upon the cherubim, i.e. as in 1 Samuel 4:4, 2 Samuel 6:2, Psalm 80:1 and Isaiah 37:16. Cherubim are the traditional guardians of holy places. Archæological finds from non-Israelite societies suggest that these sometimes looked like winged bulls or lions with human heads.

It was as if God, looking down from his dwelling place between the cherubim, saw the law in the Ark and knew people were guilty of breaking his law. However, the atoning sacrificial blood was sprinkled on the mercy-seat, so that God saw the blood covering the breaking of his law, and forgiveness could be offered. It is remarkable that even before God gave Moses the tablets of the Ten Commandments, God made provision for Israel's failure under the law.

In Romans 3:25, the Greek word for propitiation (*hilasterion*) is also used in the Septuagint for the mercy-seat. The Septuagint or LXX was an early translation of the OT from Hebrew into Greek, and was read by many in the days of the NT. Therefore, it can be rightly said that 'Jesus has become the mercy-seat.' He is the place and the means of redemption.

There I will meet you. God met with Israel in the sense that he met with the representative of Israel, i.e. the high priest, in peace because of the atoning blood on the Day of Atonement; refer to Leviticus 16:14-15.

#### II.d.iii Exodus 25:23-30 - The Table for the Bread of the Presence

The table is one of three items in the Holy Place; like all the items, its pieces are to be either overlaid with gold or made of it. The Bread of the Presence consisted of twelve flat loaves of bread, symbolising the twelve tribes of Israel. Facing the lampstand, they enjoyed the perpetual light of divine blessing.



The Table for the Bread of the Presence

The wooden table, overlaid with pure gold, was 3 feet long, 1.5 feet wide, and 2.25 feet high or 1 m x 0.5 m x 0.7 m. It held the 12 loaves of the Bread of the Presence, which were holy. Wooden poles, overlaid with gold, were inserted through the rings of the table when the table was transported.

The Bread of the Presence refers to twelve loaves of unleavened bread, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, which were baked fresh each week and placed in the Holy Place as an offering to God. The old bread was removed and was only to be eaten by the priests, although King David did famously and controversially request the bread in a time of special need, something Jesus taught as being appropriate: *<<And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath>>* (Mark 2:25-27), thus providing insight as to how the law was in fact a gracious gift of God and not a restrictive practice or rite.

<sup>23</sup> You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. <sup>24</sup> You shall overlay it with pure gold, and make a moulding of gold round it. <sup>25</sup> You shall make round it a rim a handbreadth wide, and a moulding of gold round the rim. <sup>26</sup> You shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs. <sup>27</sup> The rings that hold the poles used for carrying the table shall be close to the rim. <sup>28</sup> You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these. <sup>29</sup> You shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink-offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. <sup>30</sup> And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always.

### Exodus 25:23-30

You shall make a table of acacia wood. This table was to be made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold; 3 feet long, 1 foot 6 inches wide, and 2 feet 3 inches high.

The rings that hold the poles used for carrying the table shall be close to the rim. This table was also to have rings and poles necessary to carry it, as well as accompanying dishes, pans, etc., all made out of pure gold.

And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always. On the table were set twelve loaves of showbread, literally, ‘bread of faces.’ This was bread associated with, and to be eaten before, the face of God. According to Leviticus 24:5-9, showbread was made of fine flower, and twelve cakes of showbread, one for each tribe of Israel, were set on the table and sprinkled lightly with frankincense. Once a week, the bread was replaced and normally only priests could eat the old bread.

#### II.d.iv Exodus 25:31-40 - The Lampstand

The Golden Lampstand is the second of three items in the Holy Place; like the other pieces in the tabernacle, it is made of pure gold.

The lamp provides light within the tabernacle, and the priests will be instructed to keep it burning regularly.

Its description in terms of cups, calyxes, and flowers shows that it was a symbolic tree, recalling the tree of life in Eden.



<sup>31</sup> You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The base and the shaft of the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its cups, its calyxes, and its petals shall be of one piece with it; <sup>32</sup> and there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; <sup>33</sup> three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on one branch, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on the other branch – so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. <sup>34</sup> On the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with its calyxes and petals. <sup>35</sup> There shall be a calyx of one piece with it under the first pair of branches, a calyx of one piece with it under the next pair of branches, and a calyx of one piece with it under the last pair of branches – so for the six branches that go out of the lampstand. <sup>36</sup> Their calyxes and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it one hammered piece of pure gold.

### Exodus 25:31-36

You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand was hammered out of pure gold, with no specific dimensions given, but after the pattern of a modern-day menorah. It had one middle shaft with three branches coming out of each side, for a total of seven places for lamps.

When it came to building the temple in Jerusalem, King Solomon had ten such lampstands made: <<*He made ten golden lampstands as prescribed, and set them in the temple, five on the south side and five on the north*>> (2 Chronicles 4:7).

Three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on one branch. The repetition of the almond blossom motif was important because it was the first tree to blossom in the springtime. It reminded everyone of new life and the fresh nature of God's ongoing work.

<sup>37</sup> You shall make the seven lamps for it; and the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. <sup>38</sup> Its snuffers and trays shall be of pure gold. <sup>39</sup> It, and all these utensils, shall be made from a talent of pure gold. <sup>40</sup> And see that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.

### Exodus 25:37-40

You shall make the seven lamps for it. The tabernacle represented the court of God's throne, and John describes: <<*seven flaming torches, which are the seven spirits of God*>> (Revelation 4:5b). The seven lamps represent the presence of the Holy Spirit in heaven.

The lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. Since the tabernacle itself was a completely covered tent, the only source of light was the lamps of the lampstand.

According to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain. The principle first mentioned in v.9, that the tabernacle and its furnishings were to be built according to the specific, revealed pattern, is here again emphasised. It had to be a proper representation of the heavenly reality.

Hebrews 8:5 cites v.40 in support of its argument that the tent was a faithful copy of the heavenly realities Moses saw on the mountain. From the perspective of the author of Hebrews, the tent had its purpose in the history of God's people, but that purpose is now finished, and the probably Jewish Christian readership must not think of relying on it as if it were a divinely sanctioned substitute for Christian faithfulness.