

Bible Study # 43 Exodus 25.23–40 03–27–2021

This is the first of the instructions concerning the fittings that were to be placed in the holy place, the restricted area outside the inner shrine, the holy of holies. The table was smaller than the ark, being two cubits long, a cubit wide, and a cubit and half high.

Like the ark, it was made of acacia (a.k.a. shittim, KJV) wood, and it was also overlaid with gold. It had both a molding and a rim. The molding was probably on the top of the table, whereas the rim may well have been lower, fitting around the top of the legs. Close to the rim were four golden rings to hold the poles by which the table would be transported. Even they had to be of shittim wood with a gold overlay.

The table from the second temple was taken by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 b.c. (1 Macc. 1:23), and a replacement was made by Judas Maccabeus (1 Macc. 4:47-51). Following the fall of Jerusalem in a.d. 70, the table was removed by the Romans. It is shown on the inscription on Titus' Arch in Rome.

The vessels to be made of pure gold were plates, ladles, pitchers, and offering bowls. The plates were for the bread (Lev. 24:5-6), while the ladles were for holding incense (Lev. 24:7). Wine for drink offerings was kept in the pitchers, from where it was poured into the offering bowls (Num. 15:1-10).

Unleavened bread was put on the plates, and it is designated here, and elsewhere, as 'bread of the presence'. This has often been interpreted as meaning that the bread was a symbol of God's presence. However, the context here, literally, 'put on the table the bread of the presence before me continually', suggests that this bread was an offering brought to the place where God symbolically was present.

The reference to 'regularly' or 'continually' indicates that this was to be the regular custom, as the loaves were eaten by the Levitical priests (Lev. 24:9), and then replaced with fresh bread. This led to the term 'continuous bread' being used as an alternative description of it (Num. 4:7). In addition to it being an offering, indicating Israel's dependence on God, it also pointed to the fact that God provided for and sustained his people.

The provision of light for the holy place was by a lampstand (menorah) that was to be kept burning from evening until morning. It was the task of the priests to ensure that this was done (27:20-21). The lampstand was a stylized almond tree, and as such it was one of the few parts of the Tent that, in addition to a utilitarian purpose, had aspects that were purely decorative.

The tree-like menorah may well have suggested that this was part of a new Garden of Eden. It is impossible to try and re-create a lampstand according to the directions given, as, like other parts of the sanctuary, it was made in accordance with the pattern shown to Moses on the mount (25:40).

A lampstand from the second temple was also taken when Jerusalem fell to the Romans in a.d. 70, and it is depicted on the Arch of Titus in Rome. Some of the translation and interpretation of this section is difficult because words are used in a different way than elsewhere in the Old Testament.

Once again pure gold is specified as the material out of which an item was to be made, and immediately mention is made of decorations that were to be part of the lampstand – 'flower-like cups, buds and blossoms shall be of one piece with it' (v. 31). The lampstand had a base, a central shaft and six branches, three on either side. Three cups like almond flowers were on each branch, while the central shaft had four.

The description of the lampstand in Zechariah 4:1-7 is clearly based on the one in the Tent of Meeting, but it passes over many points and changes others to fit in with the main intent of the vision, e.g. the reservoirs on the lampstand are fed automatically with oil from the adjacent olive trees.

The central shaft had a lamp on it, and so did each of the six branches. To enable the lampstand to function efficiently it needed wick trimmers and trays, and they were also to be made of pure gold. The specification is given in verse 39 (and in 38:24) that a talent of gold was required 'for the lampstand and these [accessories]'.

This would amount to 34 kg of gold. The final verse in this section is a repetition of the instruction regarding the lampstand that it had to be made according to the pattern being shown to Moses on the mount. Visual and oral revelation combined to give the complete picture.

The opening word in verse 40, 'and see', is virtually equivalent to 'behold', and it functions to draw specific attention to what follows.

Our next study will cover Exodus 26:1–14.