

Bible Study # 47 Exodus 27.9–21 04–01–2021

The most outward part of the Tent of Meeting was the courtyard, which was an open area into which any worshipper could enter. It was also the place of sacrifice, where, after a layman killed the animal, a priest offered it on the altar.

Parts of the description are difficult to interpret, and it is not surprising that from the time of early Jewish writers, such as Philo and Josephus, various attempts have been made to work out how the whole tent fitted together.

These discussions concern matters such as the number of posts and whether the corner ones were counted twice. Many writers have insisted that the space between the posts was identical, but nowhere in the text is this asserted.

In vs. 9–11 a boundary was set around an area measuring a hundred cubits long by fifty cubits wide. This courtyard was enclosed with finely twisted linen curtains, held in place by twenty posts on each side. These fitted into bronze bases with silver hooks and bands. No measurement is given for the height of the curtains until v. 18.

The west end (lit., ‘the one towards the [Mediterranean] Sea’) was fifty cubits wide, having curtains, ten posts, and ten bases. Similar provision was made for the one facing the east (lit. ‘the one towards the sunrise’). A variation in terminology occurs between chapters 26 and 27 in reference to the curtains and posts.

In describing the ‘curtains’ and ‘posts’ in chapter 26 different terms are used than in chapter 27. Here the terms are ‘hangings’ and ‘pillars’. Fewer bases are specified for these curtains, and there is no mention either of the type of wood needed or if they were overlaid with any metal.

While the curtains were to be made of blue, purple and scarlet linen (as in 26:1, 31), yet they were not decorated with cherubim, marking again a distinction between the inner holy places and the outer court.

Provision was made for an entrance into the courtyard, a curtain of twenty cubits, with four posts and four bases. While it is normally assumed that this screen was placed in line with the other curtains, this does not necessarily follow. It could easily have been placed either outside or inside the line of the other curtains, creating a double entry.

Mention in verse 19 of the utensils of ‘the dwelling’ seems to be a reference to the tools used in its construction, rather than for continuing use as part of the sacrificial rituals. Also included for the first time were the pegs, presumably used, somewhat like modern tent pegs, to fasten securely all the side panels that formed part of the Tent of Meeting.

The consistent pattern of the use of bronze, when further removed from the holy places, is continued with the specification of the metal to be used for these utensils.

The golden lampstand has already been described in 25:31–40. Not only were its details important, but also the perpetual nature of its use was to be stressed. The oil to be used in it was specified (‘you shall command the children of Israel ...’) and it had three characteristics—it was to be olive oil, pure, and beaten.

That is, the oil had to be unadulterated and beaten, not pressed, in order to produce the clearest and finest oil for the purpose. The lampstand was to be placed outside the curtain that hid the contents of the Most Holy Place, and Aaron and his sons were to keep the lamps burning from evening till morning (cf. 1 Sam. 3:2–3).

It is possible that a single lamp was kept lit during the day, so that the other ones could be lit from it at night without the need for kindling a new flame. Though the prescription was that this practice of illuminating the Holy Place each night was a perpetual obligation on Israel (v. 21), yet there were times later when it was not observed in the period of the first temple. This occurred just prior to Hezekiah's reforms (see 2 Chron. 29:7).

We will continue our study with Exodus 28:1–14.