

## Bible Study # 66 Exodus 37.1–29 04–23–2021

The making of the ark of the covenant is covered in vs. 1–9, though the fact that there was an atonement cover (25:21) is not mentioned. Neither is there comment on placing the testimony in the ark (25:16, 21), as both had to take place after the dwelling place had been set up.

The important task of making the ark was not delegated to a junior person but reserved for Bezalel himself (37:1, and then the repeated third person, ‘he’, in verses 2-8).

Minor variations occur in vs. 10–16 as compared with 25:23-30, such as the omission of reference to the bread, for that comes in the later narrative (40:23). All the verbs in this section are third person singular, ‘he’, referring to Bezalel.

This should not be pressed to mean that he did all the work personally, but that he was responsible and oversaw the construction of the table. This is clearly the view adopted by the NIV translators, for, while acknowledging in a footnote that the verbs in this section are third person singular, they have inserted the third person plural, ‘they’, in the translation.

These vs. 17–24 are essentially a repetition of the earlier instructions for the Lampstand (cf. 25:31–40), except that there is abbreviation of 25:37b, 40, and 25:40 is not repeated.

No significant alteration is apparent here (vs. 25–29), as compared with the earlier instructions (cf. 30:1–5), though there are some differences between 30:1-2 and 37:25. There is also a slight adjustment in 37:27 as compared with 30:27.

This chapter is devoted entirely to the sacred furniture of the Holy Place and of the Holy of Holies, beginning with the most sacrosanct of all, the Ark of the Covenant, also known as the Ark of the Testimony (Exo. 25:16), because the two tablets of the Decalogue were placed within its chest.

No one, except the high priest himself, was permitted even to touch its surface (although the Levites or priests who carried it when moving to a new location must have been allowed to grip the carrying poles with impunity).

37:1-5. In vs. 1–5, Bezaleel, as the master craftsman, was privileged to put the chest together with boards of acacia wood, and then to cover the entire chest inside and out with a thick layer of pure gold. Four feet were attached to the four corners at the bottom, and it was to these four feet that large golden rings were attached.

The gold-covered carrying poles were inserted through these rings whenever the Ark had to be moved. Never was the chest to be touched by any other person, for to do so would mean sudden death (as the well-meaning Uzzah found out in the time of David; cf. 2 Sam. 6:3-10).

Bezalel himself was of course free from danger while he was fashioning and preparing the Ark for divine service; it was only after it was officially dedicated to the Lord that the sacrosanctity of these holy objects came into effect with the descent of the Glory Cloud upon the sanctuary (Exo. 40). After that took place, not even the workmen who constructed them were permitted to touch what they had made without lethal consequences.

The labor (vs. 6–9) spent in fashioning the solid gold “lid” or “covering” that was placed on the chest itself was described in detail. The Hebrew for this was derived from the same root as the verb, “to atone.” The KJV translates this as “mercy seat,” while the NASB and NIV render the term as “atonement cover.” The most accurate equivalent might be “the propitiatory,” (cf. Rom. 3:25, 1<sup>st</sup> John 2:2) even though it sounds technical.

At any rate, the measurements are given as two and one-half cubits in length and one and one-half cubits in width, or about forty-three by twenty-six inches. And yet, even though it was so modest in size, it was most awe-inspiring because of its beautiful workmanship in pure gold with the two cherubim on top, facing each other with outstretched wings.

Surely the very sight of it must have been overwhelming even to Aaron himself, especially after the glory cloud hovered over it with blinding radiance after the consecration recorded in ch. 40.

Vs. 10-16 describe the table of the Bread of the Presence (referring to the Presence of the glory cloud in the Holy of Holies) which was designed to hold the twelve loaves of bread representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Its dimensions were quite modest, two cubits by one cubit (thirty-five by seventeen and one-half inches) and only one and one-half cubits in height (less than twenty-six inches).

It was constructed of acacia or shittim wood coated with pure gold plating. A projecting ridge of gold was installed on the four sides of the table, near the top surface. For convenience in lifting and carrying this table, a gold ring was inserted by the four legs, quite near the top, and these made it possible to insert two gold-plated rods of the appropriate diameter and likewise of acacia wood.

Quite naturally, the plates and bowls and ladles needed for the handling of the loaves were also fashioned of gold. The same was true of the pitchers, which were designed to hold the libations that would assist in the pouring of libations within the Holy Place.

Because the Holy Place was roofed by several layers of covering in the ceiling above, it was necessary for a Lampstand to illuminate the room (vs/ 17–24) for the services of worship to be conducted there. This Lampstand also had an important symbolic significance, for it was to be representative of the full and perfect light of God which dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin that inheres in the natural man.

It symbolized the light of revelation and guidance of life, without which there could be no deliverance from the damnation of the fallen human race. Because of this, we may understand the purpose of the Menorah (the Hebrew term for Lampstand) as twofold: to show the worshiper his guilt and need before a holy God, and to lead him out of his moral and spiritual darkness into the new life or new birth graciously bestowed upon repentant believers.

The beautiful Lampstand was to be fashioned entirely of gold and so constructed that the center stem would furnish a base for three arms or branches on each side and curved upward to be in line with the top of the middle stem. Each of these curved branches would be ornamented with three golden cups shaped like a budding almond blossom.

On the top of all seven stems (including the center post), a small base would be fashioned so as to support an oil lamp, totaling seven such lamps. Presumably, each of them was equipped with a handle, so that the officiating priest or Levite could service it at sunset and again at sunrise. That is to say that the linen wick would have to be trimmed in order to remove the charred top of the wick.

Also, the oil level needed to be checked, so that the wick would have sufficient fuel for a sturdy flame all during the daylight hours and through the nighttime watches as well. And of course, the trimming scissors were likewise to be made of gold.

No measurement of the height of this Lampstand is given in this passage, but the fact that exactly one talent (approximately seventy-five pounds) was to be used for this purpose would give a fair indication as to its vertical and horizontal dimensions. Quite possibly, it was nearly five feet tall, according to M. F. Unger's Bible Dictionary—which, however, presumes a twenty-inch Tabernacle cubit.

The final verses (25–29) deal with the small altar, intended not for blood sacrifice but for adoration and prayer. It was only a cubit wide and a cubit deep, and its height was to be a mere two cubits. Golden horns were to be installed on each corner, and they were to be of the same layer as the top of the altar. The acacia frame was to be protected by gold overlay, and a golden molding surrounded the perimeter near the top.

As in the case of the other temple furniture, the incense altar was to be equipped with rings so that carrying poles could be inserted when the Tabernacle was to be moved to a new location. The last verse in this chapter states that the sacred sweet smelling oil (the ingredients of which are specified in 30:34) was carefully prepared for use at this altar, as was the fragrant incense prescribed in 30:30-33.

Our next study will cover Exodus 38:1–31.