



Studies in the Book of Exodus

Text

Exodus 25:23-40 & 30:1-10

Topic

Gold figures prominently as God tells Moses to make the three articles of furniture required in the Holy Place

Title

"This Gold House"

It always starts at a garage sale.

The lady bought a small table at a garage sale. The owner was asking \$30.00, but settled for \$25.00.

Why not bring it to the *Antiques Roadshow*? Turns out, it was a "Federal inlaid mahogany demilune card table" made by John Seymour & Son in Boston circa 1794.

Lucky for her, she didn't try to refinish it, or even clean it up much with harsh chemicals. The Keno brothers couldn't contain their excitement as they estimated its value at auction to be between \$200,000.00 to \$225,000.00.

The moral of that story: If you ever have a garage sale, never watch *Antiques Roadshow*. You'll kick yourself.

Forget John Seymour & Son. The real find would be a Bezalel & Aholiab. They were chief among the skilled craftsmen who made the one-of-a-kind furniture that was placed in the Jewish Tabernacle, and later the Temple. In Exodus chapter thirty-one we read,

Exo 31:1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Exo 31:2 "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.

Exo 31:3 And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all *manner of* workmanship...

Exo 31:6 "And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan... that they may make all that I have commanded you:

Exo 31:7 the tabernacle of meeting, the ark of the Testimony and the mercy seat that *is* on it, and all the furniture of the tabernacle

Exo 31:8 the table and its utensils, the pure *gold* lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense,

Exo 31:9 the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the laver and its base -

Exo 31:10 the garments of ministry, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests,

Exo 31:11 and the anointing oil and sweet incense for the holy *place*. According to all that I have commanded you they shall do."

These were more than *furniture*; they were *figures* of what was coming in the future.

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 Each Article Of Furniture You Saw In The Holy Place Had A Function, and #2 Each Article Of Furniture You Saw In The Holy Place Was A Figure.

#1 Each Article Of Furniture You Saw In The Holy Place Had A Function

Morning and Evening is the classic devotional by Charles Spurgeon. If I'm not mistaken, the title is derived from the fact that in the Jewish Tabernacle, the priests had service to perform before God each day at morning and evening.

They performed their daily tasks in the Holy Place. The Tabernacle consisted of two rooms:

1. The Holy Place, twice as long as it was wide; and,
2. The Holy of Holies, a perfect cube.

A thick veil separated the two rooms. In the Holy of Holies there was one article of furniture: The Ark of the Covenant with its lid, the Mercy Seat.

In the Holy Place there were three pieces of furniture:

1. The Table of Showbread.
2. The Lampstand; and,
3. The Altar of Incense.

Moses starts by describing the Table of Showbread.

Exo 25:23 "You shall also make a table of acacia wood; two cubits *shall be* its length, a cubit its width, and a cubit and a half its height.

The cubit is not an exact measurement. It is the distance between your elbow and the tip of your middle finger. It averages eighteen inches, but throughout history, and in different cultures, it varies.

It's no crazier than the fact that a standard 2x4 measures only 1½" x 3½". Which is why you should *always* have a board stretcher handy.

Exo 25:24 And you shall overlay it with pure gold, and make a molding of gold all around.

Exo 25:25 You shall make for it a frame of a handbreadth all around, and you shall make a gold molding for the frame all around.

Exo 25:26 And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and put the rings on the four corners that *are* at its four legs.

Exo 25:27 The rings shall be close to the frame, as holders for the poles to bear the table.

Exo 25:28 And you shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, that the table may be carried with them.

When Bezalel & Aholiab were working on this stuff, I'm not sure if they whistled while they worked, but God was giving them wisdom while they worked. He was directing their gifts by His Spirit. If two other craftsmen had been chosen, I'm guessing the articles of furniture would have looked different even as they still fit the general pattern.

I can't help but think of the fact that, while every believer is given a spiritual gift or gifts, we each exercise them differently. Even the gifts themselves are distributed by the Holy Spirit as He sees fit - not according to our preferences.

There is an amazing sequence in the feature film, *Apollo 13*, where Ground Control realizes that the three astronauts are creating too much carbon dioxide and are running out of breathable air. They need to make a scrubber to absorb the CO² - but they've got to do so using only the materials they have on hand in the lunar module that had become their lifeboat.

In record time, the Crew Systems Division put together an improvised adapter using all sort of weird and random parts, like a flight manual cover, suit parts, and socks.

I see in that an illustration for us. Every local church is tasked with two things:

1. Building-up Christians in their walk with Jesus; and,
2. Reaching out to nonbelievers with the Gospel.

Those are the tasks, and we are to accomplish them with the gifted folks God brings, and the resources He provides through them.

There's no use thinking we need more people, or different people with certain gifts. Or that we need more money, or other resources, in order to accomplish the tasks. No, **we build with what is on-board.**

We need to get everyone ‘on board’ working, exercising their gift or gifts, living sacrificially each day.

This is what Calvary Hanford looks like as we build.

Exo 25:29 You shall make its dishes, its pans, its pitchers, and its bowls for pouring. You shall make them of pure gold.

The “dishes and pans” probably held the showbread. The “bowls” were probably for the powdered frankincense, which was to be spread over the twelve loaves of showbread. The “pitchers” must have been vessels for wine used in the drink offerings mentioned elsewhere (Numbers 15:1-12).

Exo 25:30 And you shall set the showbread on the table before Me always.

“Showbread” is also called “the bread of the Presence” because in the Holy Place, it was in God’s presence. Elsewhere in the Bible we learn that this bread of the Presence was made of fine flour, baked in 12 loaves, arranged in two piles of 6 loaves each on the Table, covered with frankincense, and served as a memorial food offering to the Lord.

The bread could only be eaten by priests in a holy place and was set out fresh every Sabbath day (Leviticus 24:8-9).

Next Moses describes the Lampstand.

Exo 25:31 "You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its *ornamental* knobs, and flowers shall be *of one piece*.

The word for “lampstand” is where we get our word *menorah*. The lampstand is sometimes referred to as a candlestick, but that’s wrong seeing as it did not hold candles. It’s “bowls” held oil, and that is what fueled it as a lamp.

Exo 25:32 And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side.

Exo 25:33 Three bowls *shall be* made like almond *blossoms* on one branch, *with an ornamental* knob and a flower, and three bowls made like almond *blossoms* on the other branch, *with an ornamental* knob and a flower - and so for the six branches that come out of the lampstand.

Exo 25:34 On the lampstand itself four bowls *shall be* made like almond *blossoms*, *each with its ornamental* knob and flower.

Exo 25:35 And *there shall be* a knob under the *first* two branches of the same, a knob under the *second* two branches of the same, and a knob under the *third* two branches of the same, according to the six branches that extend from the lampstand.

Exo 25:36 Their knobs and their branches *shall be of one piece*; all of it *shall be* one hammered piece of pure gold.

On each side of an upright shaft were three branches extended upward. Each branch had three almond flower-shaped cups, and the center shaft had four such cups. At the top of the center shaft and each of the six branches was a lamp.

Exo 25:37 You shall make seven lamps for it, and they shall arrange its lamps so that they give light in front of it.

The Lampstand’s “lamps” provided the only light in the Holy Place.

Exo 25:38 And its wick-trimmers and their trays *shall be* of pure gold.

Exo 25:39 It shall be made of a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils.

The amount of gold needed was estimated at 75 pounds. Today that translates to \$1.3mil.

How expensive a project was this Tabernacle? According to the *Easton Bible Dictionary* the metals used in the tabernacle were as follows:

- 29 Talents 730 Shekels of Gold.
- 100 Talents 1,775 Shekels of Silver.
- 70 Talents 2,400 Shekels of Brass (which most scholars believe to be copper).

I won't bother you with all the conversions. It come out to over \$52mil. That's not counting the textiles and the wood. Those items add at least \$5mil. If we adjust for inflation... Well, let's just say it's a lot.

There is a movement among Christians to decry the owning of buildings and property. It's seen as wasteful of resources that could go towards furthering the Gospel, and helping others.

It should be clear that God is not immediately offended by a nice facility. He commands us to meet together, in fact. The real issue is stewardship of the resources God provides. And by that I mean the local leadership needs to hear from the Lord.

In some cases, He may direct a church to not own property; in another, He may direct just the opposite.

In any case, we must be good stewards - good managers - of what He provides; and there's just no one way of doing that.

Exo 25:40 And see to it that you make *them* according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.

I've emphasized the freedom we have to minister before the Lord as He sees fit to gift us. But we also need reminding that some things are never negotiable. The Bible itself reveals those doctrines that are essential to the Christian faith. Among them are:

1. The deity of Jesus Christ.
2. Salvation by grace.
3. Salvation through Jesus Christ alone.
4. The physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.
5. The Gospel.
6. Monotheism.
7. The Trinity.

If any one of those is denied, or deleted, we are not building according to the pattern given to us.

The last piece of furniture in the Holy Place was the Altar of Incense. It isn't described in our chapter, but since it was in the Holy Place, I want to look at it now. Skip or scroll ahead to chapter thirty.

Exo 30:1 "You shall make an altar to burn incense on; you shall make it of acacia wood.

Exo 30:2 A cubit *shall be* its length and a cubit its width - it shall be square - and two cubits *shall be* its height. Its horns *shall be* of one piece with it.

Exo 30:3 And you shall overlay its top, its sides all around, and its horns with pure gold; and you shall make for it a molding of gold all around.

Exo 30:4 Two gold rings you shall make for it, under the molding on both its sides. You shall place *them* on its two sides, and they will be holders for the poles with which to bear it.

Exo 30:5 You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold.

Also known as the Golden Altar, it was similarly constructed of acacia wood overlaid with gold, with rings and poles. It's purpose was to burn incense, although we will see that blood was also sprinkled on its horns.

As chapter thirty continues, we get into some of the functions of these three pieces of furniture.

Exo 30:6 And you shall put it before the veil that *is* before the ark of the Testimony, before the mercy seat that *is* over the Testimony, where I will meet with you.

Exo 30:7 "Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning; when he tends the lamps, he shall burn incense on it.

Exo 30:8 And when Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense on it, a perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.

Exo 30:9 You shall not offer strange incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; nor shall you pour a drink offering on it.

Exo 30:10 And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement; once a year he shall make atonement upon it throughout your generations. It *is* most holy to the LORD."

Reading this, you can get a sense of the priests while inside the Holy Place, at each piece of furniture:

- Daily, the priests burned sweet-smelling incense morning and evening. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest was to consecrate the altar of incense by placing blood on its four horns
- Daily they tended the Lampstand. Every morning and evening the priest had to use the tools to keep the flames burning brightly.
- Weekly, they replaced the 12 loaves of bread. The old bread was removed every Sabbath, eaten by the priests inside the Holy Place, and replaced with new loaves.

As Christians who enjoy the New Covenant, we've been conditioned to quickly dismiss the Tabernacle and its service as inferior to our superior relationship with God through Jesus Christ in this, the church age. After all, when Jesus died and exclaimed, "It is finished!" the veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. Every believer now has immediate access to God, and is encouraged to boldly approach the Throne of God.

True enough. But that doesn't mean we can't linger for a moment and sense the wonder the priests must have experienced.

A few months prior, they had been oppressed slaves, holding on to the oral traditions of their God, the God of Abraham, and surrounded by Egypt's gods and their idols. Now here they were - ministering with the very glory of God just behind a veil, within a few feet of them.

We didn't get into it, but the priests wore ornate, expensive outfits. They had literally gone from rags to riches.

In the Holy Place, tending the oil and the lamps of the Lampstand, they couldn't help but think of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Oil was as much a symbol of God's Spirit to Israel as it remains for us. True, under the Old Covenant the Spirit did not permanently indwell believers. But He certainly filled them, and empowered them, to accomplish His purposes.

The Lampstand itself was the product of God's Spirit working through Moses, Bezalel, and Aholiab.

Do we not also need to be reminded that having begun in the Spirit, we cannot make spiritual progress by yielding to our flesh?

On the Table were 12 loaves. They got to consume those loaves after they'd been in God's presence for a week of ministry. They may not have caught all the future symbolism, but it was obvious they represented the twelve tribes.

Loaves spoke of dining together, casually, intimately. The presence of the bread of the Presence invited the priests to have fellowship with God.

Do we not also need to be reminded that it is to have fellowship with God that we are made new creations in Jesus Christ?

For over four hundred years they had prayed to be delivered from bondage in Egypt. Now the priest could, in a sense, 'see' those prayers in the incense that constantly rose up to God. He had heard them; He did hear them; and in His eternal wisdom, He answered them in His time.

We all know the pain of seemingly unanswered prayer. The suffering of situations God could change for us. Our prayers do rise before the Throne. His answers are often a mystery to us:

- We may receive what we consider to be a positive answer to our prayers.
- We may be encouraged to suffer for a time, like Job.
- We may be called upon to endure much suffering, at all levels of our humanness, like the apostle Paul.

These furnishings are inferior for us, but they were cutting-edge at the time. They didn't go in to the Holy Place daily, or annually, thinking about what a bummer it was. They were blessed beyond measure by God's progressive revelation of Himself.

#2 Each Article Of Furniture You Saw In The Holy Place Was A Figure

Do people still talk about Feng Shui? It was big a while back.

Feng Shui is part of a greater Chinese metaphysics that you ought to avoid.

It is sometimes thought to be the art of placement - understanding how the placement of yourself and objects within a space affects your life. The idea is to harmonize with the so-called “energies” in any given space - be it a home, office, or garden.

If you’ve been in my office, it’s more **Kid’s Way** than Feng Shui.

It wasn’t Feng Shui that the Lord was going for in the placement of furniture in the Tabernacle. It was **prefiguring**.

The Tabernacle has been called “an earthly sanctuary with a heavenly meaning.” That’s because what God instructed Moses to build was a copy on the earth of things in Heaven.

In the Book of Hebrews we read,

Heb 8:1 ... We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,

Heb 8:2 a Minister of the sanctuary and of **the true tabernacle which the Lord erected**, and not man.

There is a “true tabernacle” in Heaven; it was “erected” by the Lord. Jesus is its great High Priest.

“We,” meaning Christians in this church age, no longer need any earthly replica of the heavenly tabernacle, or any of its rituals. Please do not get sidetracked by those who teach we as Gentiles need to return to our Hebrew roots. In the first century, **the writer to Hebrews was telling Hebrews to not return to their Hebrew roots - so why should we?**

Later the writer to the Hebrews would call the earthly Tabernacle “a shadow of good things to come” (10:1). We’ll see that it all prefigured Jesus. It was the shadow He cast.

If I have any familiarity at all with this Table of Showbread, the minute I read in the New Testament that Jesus is “the bread of life” (John 6:35), I understand that it prefigured Him - that it pointed to Him. He is the true Bread, who sustains us in our new life, satisfies our hungry souls, and fills us with the joy of His never-failing Presence.

Similarly, the Lampstand prefigured Jesus as “the light of the world,” “the True Light,” and “the Light and Life of Men.”

In the last book of the Bible, in the Revelation, Jesus refers to the church on earth as His lampstand. He is the light; and we are His lights.

There was no other light in the Tabernacle. Likewise, there is no other light in the world besides Jesus revealed through us.

The Table of Incense represented more than prayer rising to God. Blood was sprinkled there.

Thus it prefigured Jesus blood sacrifice on the Cross whereby He became our Advocate with the Father, to continuously offer prayers on our behalf as the One Who ever lives to intercede.

There’s so much more we could say about these articles of furniture prefiguring Jesus Christ. For example: The fact they were constructed of wood overlaid with gold speaks of Jesus as both fully man and fully God - God in human flesh.

Or the fact that, from above it looking down, the very articles of furniture are arranged as a Cross. It goes on-and-on.

(Louis Talbot has a classic book, *Christ in the Tabernacle*, that I'd highly recommend).

Listen to this, from First Peter 1:10-12.

1Pe 1:10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you,

1Pe 1:11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

1Pe 1:12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven - things which angels desire to look into.

The context of these verses was the sufferings of the Savior. The prophets who wrote about them didn't really understand what they were writing about under inspiration. But now we do.

Similarly, the Israelites couldn't have seen Jesus prefigured. Not totally, anyway. But now **we** do.

A passage in Hebrews makes for a fitting conclusion.

Heb 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession.

Heb 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are, yet* without sin.

Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

William MacDonald writes,

The people in OT days could not draw near to Him. Only the high priest could approach Him, and then only on one day of the year. We can go into His presence at any time of the day or night and **obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need**. His **mercy** covers the things we should not have done, and His **grace** empowers us to do what we should do but do not have the power to do.

Forget priceless furniture. We have in Jesus God's indescribable gift.

Have you received Him?