

Tabernacle

Twice a day, a priest would stand in front of the golden prayer altar and burn fragrant incense. Other procedures were also carried out in the tabernacle:

- The Daily Meal-Offering: [Leviticus 6:8-30](#)
- Guilt Offerings and Peace Offerings: [Leviticus 7](#)
- Ceremony of Ordination: [Leviticus 8](#)
- Octave of Ordination: [Leviticus 9](#)
- Wine forbidden to priests in the tabernacle: [Leviticus 10:8-15](#)
- Day of Atonement: [Leviticus 16](#)
- Sacrifice only at the tabernacle: [Leviticus 17](#)
- [Ordeal](#) for suspected adulteresses: [Numbers 5:11-29](#)
- Dedication of [Nazirites](#): [Numbers 6:1-21](#)
- Preparation of the ashes of a [red heifer](#) for the Water of Purification: [Numbers 19](#)

The door of the tabernacle marked a ritual boundary: an Israelite healed of *tzaraath* would be presented by the priest who had confirmed his healing 'at the door of the tabernacle of Meeting', and a woman healed of prolonged menstruation would present her offering (two turtledoves or two young pigeons) to the priest 'at the door of the tabernacle of Meeting'. It was at the door of the tabernacle that the community wept in sorrow when all the men who had joined in worship to Baal of Peor were condemned to death.

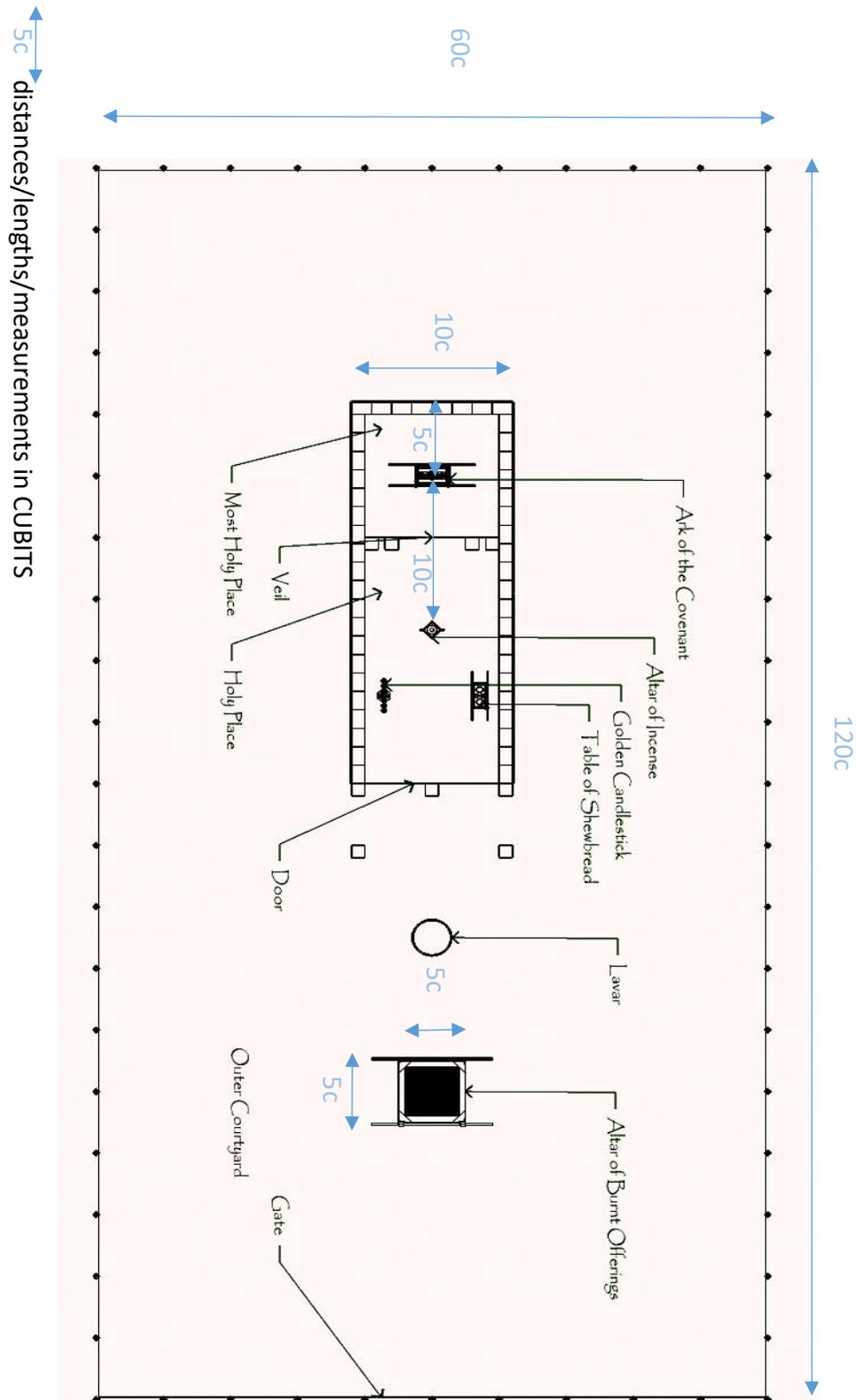
During the conquest of Canaan, the main Israelite camp was at **Gilgal**, ([Joshua 4:19](#); [5:8-10](#)) and the tabernacle was probably erected within the camp: [Joshua 10:43 ESV](#) "...and returned into the camp." (see [Numbers 1:52-2:34](#) "...they shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side.")

After the conquest and division of the land among the tribes, the tabernacle was moved to **Shiloh** in Ephraimite territory (Joshua's tribe) to avoid disputes among the other tribes ([Joshua 18:1](#); [19:51](#); [22:9](#); [Psalm 78:60](#)). It remained there during the 300-year period of the biblical judges (the rules of the individual judges total about 350 years [[1 Kings 6:1](#); [Acts 13:20](#)], but most ruled regionally and some terms overlapped). According to [Judges 20:26-28](#), the Ark, and thus possibly the tabernacle, was at Bethel while Phinehas, grandson of Aaron, was still alive.

The subsequent history of the structure is separate from that of the Ark of the Covenant. After the Ark was captured by the Philistines, King Saul moved the tabernacle to **Nob**, near his home town of **Gibeah**, but after he massacred the priests there ([1 Samuel 21-22](#)), it was moved to **Gibeon**. ([1 Chronicles 16:39](#); [21:29](#); [2 Chronicles 1:2-6](#), 13). Just prior to David's moving the ark to Jerusalem, the ark was located in **Kiriath-Jearim** ([1 Chronicles 13:5-6](#)).

The Ark was eventually brought to **Jerusalem**, where it was placed "inside the tent David had pitched for it" ([2 Samuel 6:17](#); [1 Chronicles 15:1](#)), not in the tabernacle, which remained at Gibeon. The altar of the tabernacle at Gibeon was used for sacrificial worship ([1 Chronicles 16:39](#); [21:29](#); [1 Kings 3:2-4](#)), until Solomon finally brought the structure and its furnishings to Jerusalem to furnish and dedicate the Temple. ([1 Kings 8:4](#))

There is no mention of the tabernacle in the Tanakh after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Babylonians in c. 587 BC.

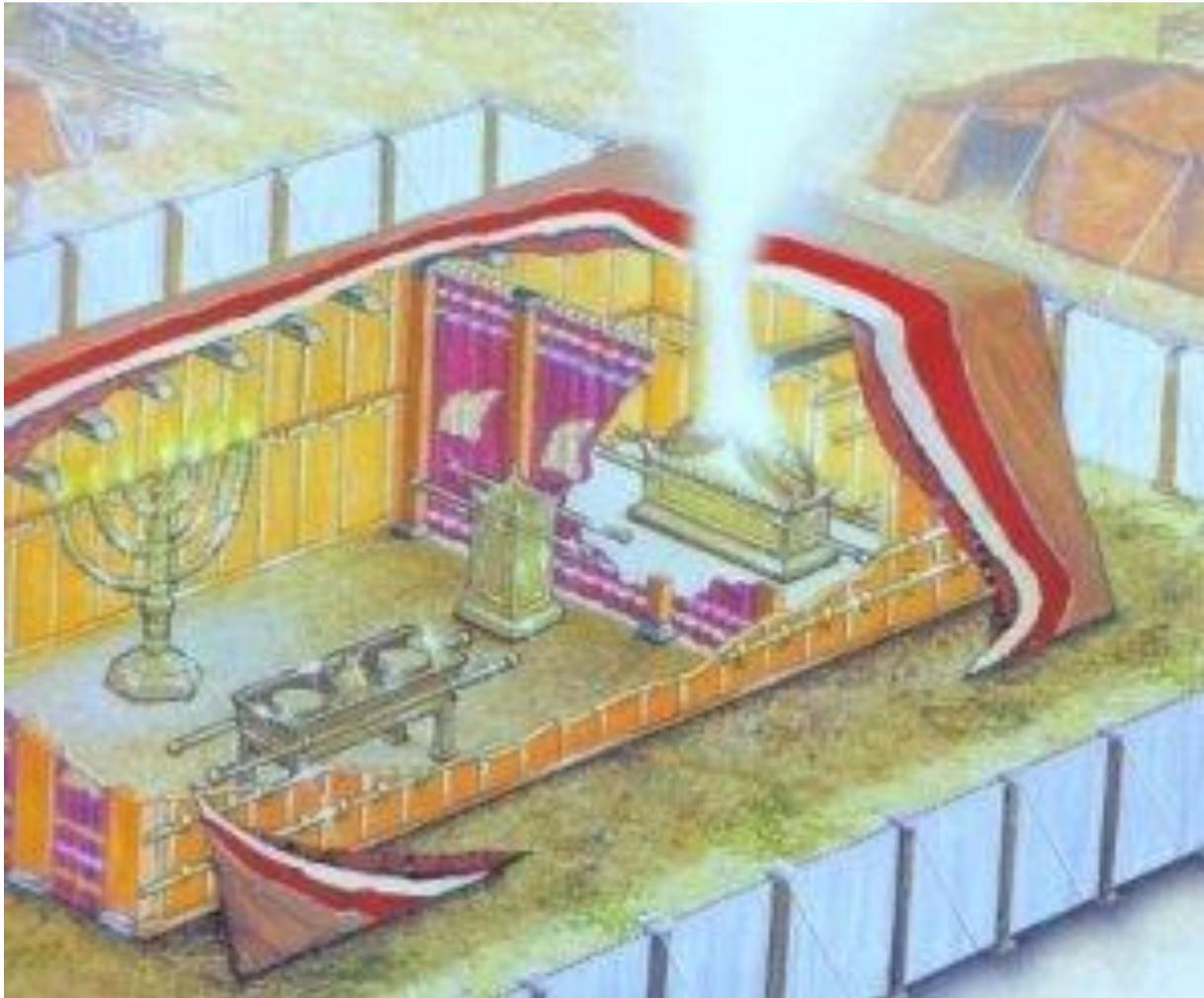


The Tabernacle of Moses

Exodus 25:1 - 40:38 depicts God's command to Moses to build a tabernacle for Him to dwell amongst His people in the wilderness. These verses are very repetitive in describing, in detail, the materials and construction of the Exodus Tabernacle. It was to be essential in the relationship between God and Israel, and the primary focus of their wilderness experience.

God's command to Moses is found in **Exodus 25:8-9**.

"And let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct."



The Ark of the Covenant

Exodus 25

The Biblical description of the tabernacle of Moses begins with the innermost parts and works its way outward, meaning the Ark and the sacred objects are built first, followed by the actual structure built last. The Ark of the Covenant was to be placed inside the Holy of Holies, or the Most Holy Place, this was a 15' x 15' x 15' room inside the Tabernacle tent, separated by a veil. It was the innermost room of the Tabernacle.

Exodus 25:10-22 describes the dimensions and construction of the Ark of the Covenant and its Mercy Seat. In verse ten God tells Moses to build "***an ark of acacia wood***".

The ark was to be 2.5 cubits long, 1.5 cubits wide and 1.5 cubits high. These dimensions equate to a box 3'9" long by 2'3" wide and 2'3" deep. It was constructed of wood and overlaid with a sheet of gold inside and out, and a gold molding or crowning around the bottom of it. On each side of the Ark were two golden rings fastened to it. It would be the central focus of the tabernacle of Moses.

Through these rings wooden poles, also overlaid with gold, were slid into in order to carry the Ark of the Covenant without actually touching it. God explicitly states that these poles should never be removed from the golden rings. He also states that the Ark is not to be touched by man. Future violations of this command are recorded in the Bible with the victims (some even Hebrews) dying as a result.

Interestingly enough ark's were common objects to the ancient Egyptians. Thus Moses would have had a precise idea of what God had wanted him to build based on his Egyptian experience.

The Mercy Seat

The Ark of the Covenant was a special and mysterious object within the tabernacle of Moses. Its powers are evident throughout Scripture, as the Israelites would often carry it into battle. The Ark was basically composed of two parts; the actual wooden chest overlaid with gold and containing the tablets, and the mercy seat which served as the Ark's covering and lid. The mercy seat was God's Throne among His people. It was where the presence of God dwelt. It was to be made of one solid piece of gold and hammered into shape. God lays forth precise instructions to Moses concerning the mercy seat in **Exodus 25:17-22**.

The mercy seat was to be an especially significant object, for it is where the presence of God would rest and lead Israel. God's actual presence rested on top of the Ark, on its lid, or the mercy seat. Scripture tells us two objects adorned the mercy seat, which to this day scholars are not absolutely certain what these objects looked like though the Bible does give some description.

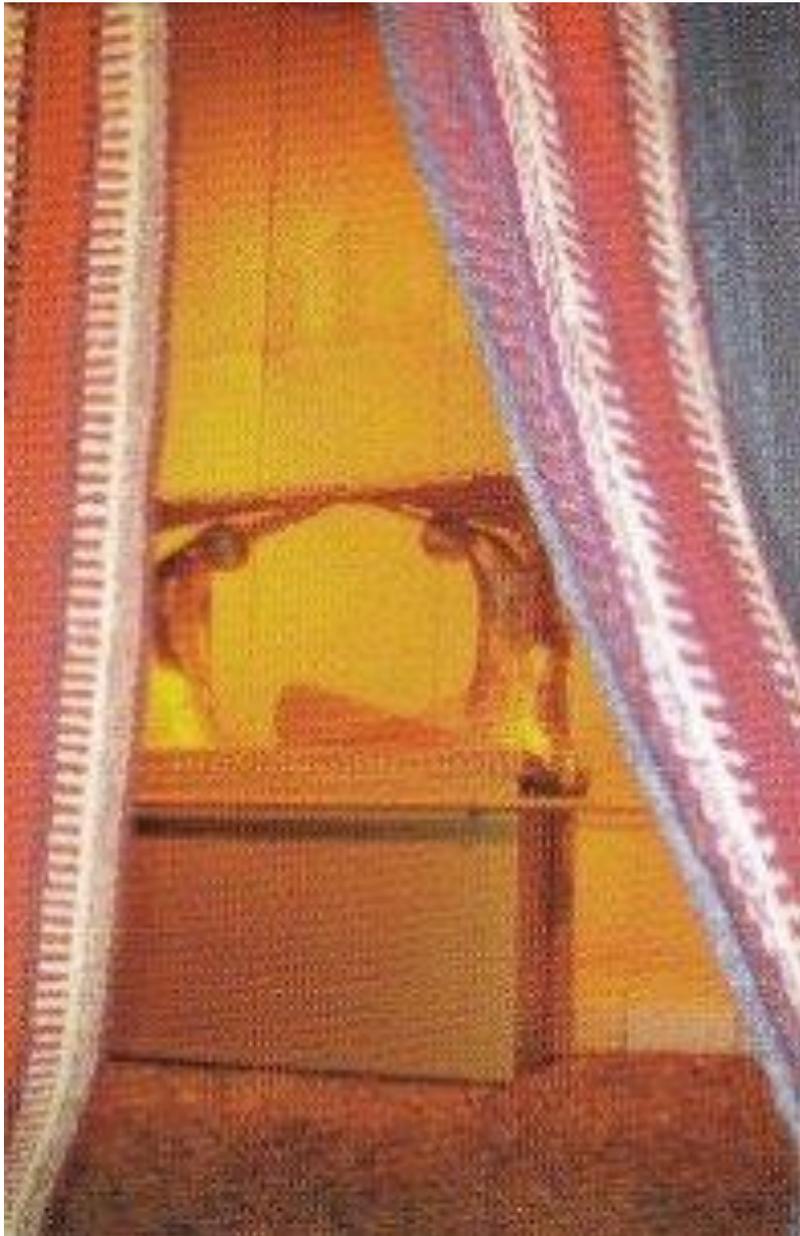
God instructed Moses to construct two golden cherubim to place on each end of the mercy seat in Exodus 25:18.

Verse nineteen specifically mentions that the entire mercy seat, including the cherubim, were to be "***of one piece***" of gold, thus it required a great deal of skill. The cherubim were to be facing each other, with their wings spread out before them. Verse twenty describes their wings as being "***spread upward, covering the mercy seat with their wings and facing each other***".

Exodus 25:22 depicts the function of the mercy seat and significance of the Ark of the Covenant.

"And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel."

The Mercy Seat was God's Throne on earth. The tabernacle of Moses would not be complete without it. The cherubim functioned to serve as symbols of God's divine throne in Heaven. God wanted Israel to see Him enthroned as their King, thus the Mercy Seat was His Kingly Throne amidst their camp. As their king, God would set His Throne at the very centre of Israel's camp.



The Holy Place and the MOST Holy Place

As one entered the Tabernacle of Moses from the outside compound the Holy Place was the first room encountered. Priests were required to be ritually pure upon entering the Holy Place, thus the Bronze Laver (to be discussed below) was used outside before entering the Holy Place. This area was holy because of its proximity to the Ark of the Covenant and God's presence. God separated this area as well for special rituals and sacrifices the priests were to make.

The Holy Place was separated from the hustle and bustle of the outside compound where animal sacrifices took place on behalf of the people. One may safely assume that inside the Holy Place things were very quiet and solemn, illuminated by the soft glow of candle light bouncing off gold, filled with the sweet smell of burning incense. It would have been a very different scene from the busy work of the priests, the constant sacrifices and the noisy bleating of the animals outside.

Inside the Holy Place was a veil which separated the Most Holy Place. Aaron and his sons were not permitted to enter inside the veil; only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place, inside the veil before the Ark and the Mercy Seat, which housed God's presence. The High Priest of the tabernacle of Moses, at this time, was Moses himself. Only he entered the Most Holy Place.

The Veil & Screen

Curtains were not only used in covering the Tabernacle but in the separating of the tent into two rooms. The veil was an integral part of the tabernacle of Moses, as it served to separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. The veil protected the Holy of Holies from man and housed the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat, where God's presence dwelt and met with Moses. **Exodus 26:31** introduces the veil.

"And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman."

The veil was to serve ***"for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies"***. Verse thirty-four states that Moses was to put the ***"mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the holy of holies"***. The curtain of the veil was described in exact same detail as the innermost covering of fine twisted linen which could only be seen inside the tabernacle of Moses.

Inside the Holy Place were three sacred objects, each with a specific purpose and function. These three pieces of sacred furniture were the Table of Showbread, the Golden Lampstand, or Menorah, and the Altar of Incense.

The Table of Showbread

God gives Moses the instructions concerning the Table of Showbread in **Exodus 25:23**. ***"And you shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long and one cubit wide and one and a half cubits high."***

These dimensions equate to a table 36 inches (3') long, 18 inches (1'6") wide and 27 inches (2'3") high. Like the Ark it was to be made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. This meant sheets of gold were hammered flat and then placed, perhaps by nail or some other method, over the wood. It was a thin covering of gold, pure gold. God also instructed Moses to ***"make a gold border around it"***.

Also like the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of Showbread possessed four gold rings set at the corner of each joint where the legs connected to the table top. Wooden poles, also overlaid with gold, were slid through the rings and used to carry the Table exactly like the Ark was transported. God also instructs Moses to make all of ***"its dishes and its pans and its jars and its bowls"*** of pure gold.

The Table of Showbread was assigned a place along the north wall of the tent of meeting. Thus as one entered the Holy Place from the Tabernacle Courtyard, the veil would be seen in front constructing the western wall of the Holy Place, separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. On the right hand side, along the northern wall outside the veil rested the Table of Showbread. These instructions were given in **Exodus 40:22**.

God also gave specific instructions to Moses on how to utilize the Table and what was to go on it. These instructions are given in **Leviticus 24:5-9**.

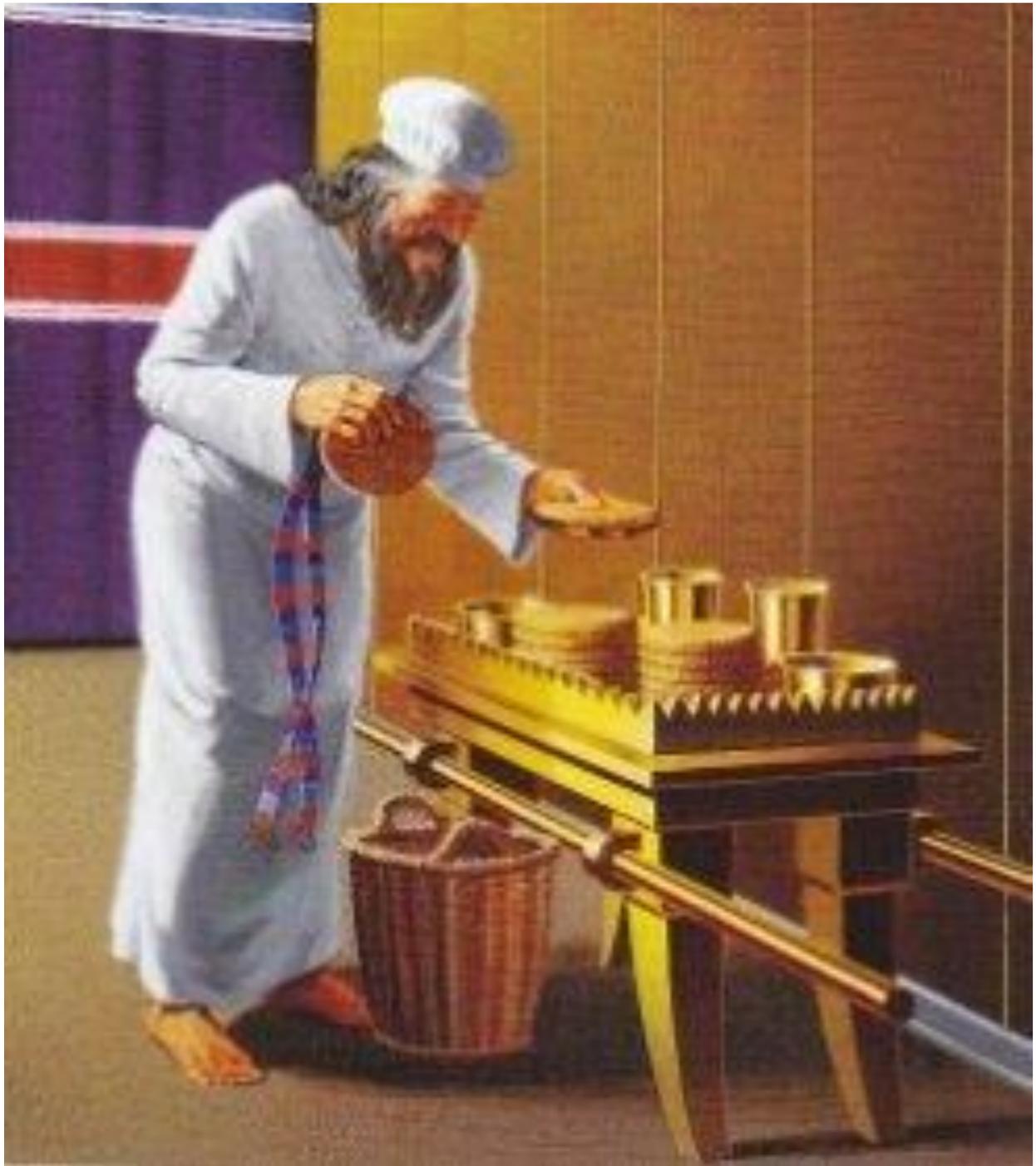
"You shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake. And you shall set them in two rows, six to a row, on the pure gold table before the Lord."

These twelve loaves represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Bread was a common metaphor throughout the Old Testament, as well as in the New Testament. It represented life, and God was the Giver of Life. (Steve note what happened at the last Supper?)

Thus the bread on the Table of Showbread represented God's provision for Israel, both through the manna in the wilderness and as God Almighty, Creator and Giver of life. The tabernacle of Moses was a reflection of God's grace and love towards mankind in every way. Not only was the bread a symbol of God's provision, but it stood as a reminder of His covenant with Israel.

Every Sabbath day the bread was replaced by new loaves. Aaron and his sons would then eat the old loaves. The bread was reserved for them only.

In eating of the bread of the Presence, Aaron and his sons were renewing their covenant with God through the covenant meal. It served them, as well as all of Israel, as a reminder of the Covenant God entered into with them at Mt. Sinai. (Steve note – remember that the advent of the NEW covenant was sealed with eating bread at the last supper)



The Golden Lampstand

Exodus 25:31-40 describes the Golden Lampstand, which provided light for the priests as they worked in the Holy Place. As the Table of Showbread was located along the northern wall of the tabernacle of Moses, the Golden Lampstand stood along the southern wall, on the left-hand side as one entered the tent. The lampstand's exact shape is unknown.

The dimensions, too, are unknown, although Jewish tradition claims it was about 5 feet high, 3'6" wide. Many pictures depict the Golden Lampstand in the form of a menorah with three shafts protruding from each side. This is a common depiction, though only one of a number of different possibilities.

The lamp was to stay lit continually, as it was one of the duties assigned to Aaron and his sons. These instructions were given to Moses in **Leviticus 24:2-4**.



The Altar of Incense

The Altar of Incense was constructed of acacia wood. **Exodus 30:2** describes its dimensions. ***"Its length shall be a cubit, and its width a cubit, it shall be square, and its height shall be two cubits; its horns shall be of one piece with it."***

The Altar of Incense was also overlaid with pure gold, with gold ***"molding all around for it"***. The Altar of Incense was thus 1.5 feet long by 1.5 feet wide by 3 feet high. Its exact shape is not known, however it possessed four horns and rings for the poles used to transport it.

Verse six describes its place within the tabernacle of Moses.

"And you shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you."

It symbolically represented the prayers of God's people. The incense from the Golden Altar of Incense produced an aroma pleasing to the Lord. King David wrote of his prayers as incense in **Psalm 141:2**.

"May my prayer be counted as incense before Thee; the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering."

In the New Testament prayers are also represented as incense. **Revelation 5:8** depicts such.

"And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

This incense, thus, served an extremely important function. Its smoke stood for the prayers of God's people which ascended to His throne. Thus Aaron and his sons were to burn incense throughout the day, as portrayed in **Exodus 30:7-8**.

"And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamp. And when Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations."

Exodus 30:34-38 goes into great detail concerning what this incense was made of. The specific ingredients mentioned are found in verse 34. This verse names ***"spices, stacted and onycha and balbanum, spices with pure frankincense"*** were to be used. However, the Bible is silent as to the exact portion of each.

Burning the incense was the special honour and privilege given to Aaron and his descendants. As such, they were to keep the incense burning by doing so at least twice daily as Scripture portrays.

(Steve note later, in the 2nd temple, this is what Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist was doing when the angel appeared to him with the news of Elizabeth's impending pregnancy – Luke ch1 specifically mentions that the angel stood to the right hand side of the altar of incense.)

The Courtyard & Sacred Objects

The tent of meeting was surrounded by an outer courtyard, which was in turn enclosed by a screened fence. **Exodus 27:9-18** gives the dimensions of the outer courtyard at 150 feet long on the northern and southern sides, and 75 feet wide at the western and eastern ends. Twenty pillars were used on the north and south sides, ten pillars formed the western fence and eastern gate. The gate's description is given in **Exodus 27:13-16**.

The Bronze altar

As one entered through the eastern gate of the tabernacle of Moses sacred objects would have been seen between the gate and the entrance to the Tent of Meeting on the western end of the courtyard. The first sacred object encountered was the Bronze Altar. The Bronze Altar is described in **Exodus 27**.

"And you shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits, and you shall make its horns on its four corners, its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze."

The Bronze Altar was 7.5 feet long by 7.5 feet wide, and stood 4.5 feet high. It was a huge altar, where animal sacrifices were lifted onto daily and tied to the four horns of the altar. **Psalms 118:27** depicts the horns of the altar being used to bind animal sacrifices.

Priests were constantly performing sacrifices, lifting the wood and flesh on and off the altar with the many utensils, cleansing the basin of the blood drained and the ashes that accumulated.

The Bronze Laver

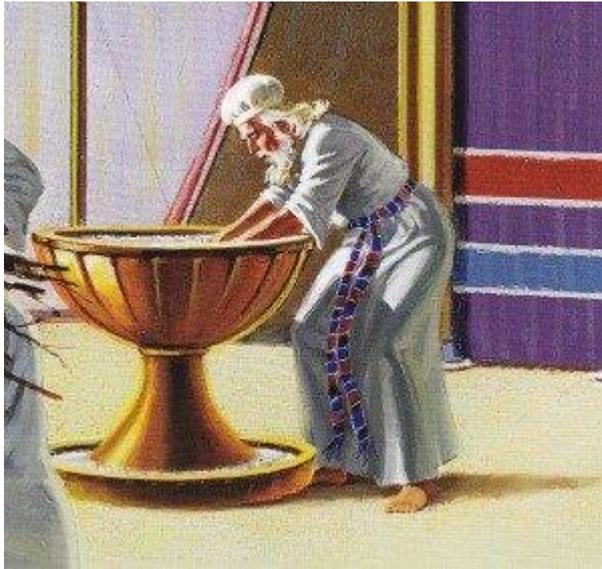
Beyond the Bronze Altar in the outer courtyard was another sacred object of the tabernacle of Moses. This was the Bronze Laver, located between the tent of meeting and the Bronze Altar of sacrifice. It rested just outside the tent, and served to cleanse the priests as they entered the inner sanctuary from the chaotic outside, as well as cleanse them ritually after performing the required sacrifices upon the Bronze Altar.

Exodus 30:18 records the instructions God gave Moses.

"You shall also make a laver of bronze, with its base of bronze, for washing; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it."

Aaron and his sons were to use this basin to wash themselves, their hands and feet, when they entered the tabernacle. Scripture warned they should wash with water ***"that they may not die"***. The Bronze Laver located outside the entrance of the tent of meeting served to meet this need.

Every time the priests entered the tent they were required to wash their hands and feet. However, the dimensions and shape of the basin is not given, thus left up to speculation.



It is important for Christians to understand that much of what is discussed in the Old Testament is implemented into the New Testament. The symbolism used to describe Christ in many ways reflects God's construction of the tabernacle of Moses in the pages of Exodus and Leviticus. The tabernacle is a reflection of God's relationship with man, and in the New Testament that relationship is embodied in Jesus Christ. Christ becomes the Christian's tabernacle (and temple), the very presence of God at the centre of the individual's heart.

The tabernacle is, in due course replaced by Solomon's temple. That is destroyed and a new one built in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah. That 2nd temple is later given a grandiose refurbishment by Herod.

Jesus then becomes the temple – remember he said he'd destroy the temple and rebuild it in 3 days. His death made the temple redundant or, more precisely, he fulfilled the functions of the temple in his own body.

Then ... post-pentecost, the metaphor and symbolism changes as WE become God's temple (eg 1 Corinthians 3.16, 6.19 individually and Ephesians 2.19-22, 1 Peter 2.5 collectively) which takes us full circle as what were mankind to be in the very beginning in Genesis chapter 1 – TSLM and DMWT, image and likeness – temple phraseology common throughout the ancient Near East regarding the 'idol' which represented the god in a temple and carried the essence of the god within it.

The death and resurrection of Jesus takes us back to what we were always meant to be!