

## Chapters 25 through 31 – Part 1

### JEHOVAH'S PLANS FOR THE SANCTUARY

#### INTRODUCTION:

*“So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.” Exodus 24:18 NKJV*

Chapter 25 marks the beginning of a very special section of scripture that continues through chapter 31. Two major events are described for us in these pages – one taking place on top of the mountain, the other at the base. While they do not begin at exactly the same time, they do both occur during the 40 day period we know from chapter 24 that Moses spent with God on the mountain. Before we deal with the sinful behavior going on below, let's talk about what happens here:

#### **On top of Mount Sinai –**

Chapter 24 tells us Moses was summoned up the mountain (for at least the 8th time) to receive, among other things, *“tablets of stone”*. It is commonly believed these tablets were designated for the 10 Commandments, etched by the finger of God. That seems to be a reasonable conclusion. In chapter 25, God will provide instructions for the building of the Ark of the Covenant, in which God tells Moses *“... you shall put the Testimony that I will give you.”* (Verse 21) Much later in the book of Exodus, when we see that all is done exactly as the Lord has spoken, we read that two tablets of stone are placed inside the Ark of the Covenant, (albeit replacement tablets, but still etched by Jehovah.) So, this *“Testimony”* from verse 21 must be referring to the Ten Commandments.

It is important to note that these tablets were not the only thing God shared with Moses during those 40 days. Exodus 24:12 tells us that God told him to *“Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them.”* As we've discussed, it is likely that these were written on papyrus or some other less “wieldy” medium than stone. But, there was more than even that. Although it is not stated in chapter 24, we will later read that Jehovah also provided instructions for amassing the materials and

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skills needed to erect a “sanctuary” at that time. This was, of course, the Tabernacle, and over the next 6 chapters Jehovah will reveal the instructions for its structure, its furniture, the priestly garments to be worn by the ones appointed to it, etc.

We know from lesson 15 that, on previous trips up the mountain, Aaron (among others) had accompanied Moses at least part-way up. This time, however, he took Joshua with him. (Ex 24:13) If I understand it correctly, Moses went alone to the top, and left Joshua farther back, probably where the 70 elders, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu had also camped earlier.

This particular trip stands out from the others, of course, for the length of time the two men were away – 40 days! (Ex 24:18) Notice what Moses told the elders before setting off: ***“Wait here for us until we come back to you. Indeed, Aaron and Hur are with you. If any man has a difficulty, let him go to them.”*** (24:14 NKJV) It seems as if Moses suspected (or possibly even knew) that this trip would be longer than his previous ones. So he placed his older brother Aaron and Hur in charge while he was gone. Does the name “Hur” ring a bell? About a week before the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, while camped at Rephidim (shown in this map) the Amalekites attacked them there in the Wilderness of Sinai, and Moses sent Joshua to lead the Israelites against the army of the Amalekites.

This battle is a famous one: As long as Moses, watching from the hillside, held up his arms the Israelites prevailed, but when he tired and lowered them, they would lose ground. Hur and Aaron were the two men responsible for holding up Moses' arms during the Israelites' day-long defeat of the Amalekites! Because of that very event and/or the confidence Moses placed in him here in Ex 24:14, it is thought by many commentators that Hur occupied some position of authority.



[NOTE: Because Hur is not mentioned again in scripture after this, many believe he **was** among those killed after the golden calf incident. We'll talk more about that

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later, but know that Caleb's son, also named Hur, is not this same person. He was from the tribe of Judah. From what we read in Deut. 6, he was certainly a follower of Jehovah. There was another Hur, also probably a descendant of Judah, who was the grandfather of Bezalel – the chief artist of the Tabernacle and the one in charge of building the Ark of the Covenant.

### Back to the top of Mount Sinai...

I began this lesson by stating that this 40 day stretch of time is an especially important section of scripture. That is readily evident when you take into account the amount of space given to it in scripture. Everything we read in chapters 25 - 31 deals with the gathering of the materials needed for the construction of this sanctuary and its furnishings **plus** specific instructions for the making of every item.

Then, an additional six chapters, 35-40, are dedicated to the carrying out of those instructions, that is to say, the construction itself. That will bring the book of Exodus, and our study, to an end. So, a total of 13 chapters – almost a third of the book – will be dedicated to the subject of the “sanctuary” or Tabernacle. This is just shy of the amount of space devoted to Moses' going to Egypt, God bringing the 10 plagues, and then Moses leading the people out of Egyptian bondage to arrive at Mount Sinai!

So, this must mean these details are of great importance, so much so, in fact, that we will be reading most of them twice. Why would the Holy Spirit direct Moses to record for us that Jehovah gave the instructions in chapters 25 - 31, and then have him report that these same instructions were actually carried out in chapters 35 - 40? The answer is just that: to reveal to us the importance of these instructions, that they were not up for interpretation, that He expected them to be followed TO THE LETTER – and they were! And to deliver the message that whatever God purposes to do, He will do! And, He will do it exactly like He said He would.

That being said, I believe there is a second reason for the repetition – perhaps an even more important theme – and that is to reveal how the presence of God came to dwell in the midst of His people! Without the repetition of the last few chapters – especially chapter 40 – we wouldn't know how the Cloud descends to cover the tabernacle and the glory of the LORD fills it. Could it be these

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chapters are about to reveal to us the very purpose for the Book of Exodus? Let's pay special attention to what is contained there:

## Part 1 – Contributions for the Sanctuary:

In the first three verses of Chapter 25 Jehovah tells Moses to ***“Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering. From everyone who gives it willingly with his heart you shall take My offering. And this is the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats' hair; ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate.”*** (NKJV)

Moses was told by God to accept the offering ***“from everyone who gives it willingly with his heart.”*** The implication being that this donation was voluntary – only if the heart was “willing”. Many people today believe that under Old Testament law the people were “mandated” to give their offerings, whereas we, under New Testament law, are not required to give. We may choose to, but aren't required to. We can debunk that theory.

Let's start by focusing on some of the details of these “freewill” contributions to the tabernacle:

**First** – They were voluntary.

**Second** – They were gladly given.

**Third** – The decision to give was evidently unanimous. Chapter 35 suggests no one opted out.

**Fourth** – The materials given were of the highest quality – certainly the best available at that time.

Leviticus chapters 4-5 teach us about “Sin and Guilt Offerings. **These were mandatory** for anyone who is guilty of sin (which is everybody). So, there are two categories of offerings in the Old Testament. Do those same two categories (mandatory/voluntary) also exist in the New Testament?

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A very good example of voluntary giving is found in II Corinthians 8-9. But there are also mentions of mandatory offerings. In Matthew 17:24-27, Jesus affirmed the legitimacy (in principle) of the compulsory “temple tax”.

***“And when they had come to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter, and said, ‘Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, ‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?’ And upon his saying, ‘From strangers,’ Jesus said to him, ‘Consequently the sons are exempt. But, lest we give them offense, go to the sea, and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a stator. Take that and give it to them for you and Me.’”***

While our Lord, as God’s only son, was not obliged to pay the temple tax (first inaugurated in Exodus 30, for the upkeep of the Tabernacle, later Temple) His payment of the tax underscored the legitimacy of such a tax for Israelites in general. And of course, there’s no denying that generosity is a characteristic of a Christian grateful for God’s mercy and blessings.

***“Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you”***  
(Matt. 5:42).

***“In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’”*** (Acts 20:35).

The Israelites’ motivation to be part of this project was high. This place was going to serve as the means for God to personally dwell among His people! (Ex 25:8) And, of course, they had what they needed for donations because, if you recall, their Egyptian neighbors had showered them with gifts just before they left Egypt. And notice what chapter 35 tells us about the artisans:

***“See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel...and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic workmanship.***

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*“And He has put in his heart the ability to teach, in him and Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do all manner of work of the engraver and the designer and the tapestry maker, in blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen, and of the weaver—those who do every work and those who design artistic works.”* I love the beautiful phrases included in this passage that illustrate just how our God works through His people: *“He called...”* *“He filled him with...”* *“He put in his heart...”* Everything came together perfectly!

But God’s plan involved much more than the sanctuary. There would be other needs once the people settled in Canaan that were far less “exciting,” but much longer-lasting. So, to insure those would be met, God established some offerings that were compulsory. For example, there would be an on-going need to support the priests and Levites, who would not receive a great deal of land when the Promised Land was divided, only a few cities instead. They devoted themselves to the service of God in the tabernacle – later the temple – and therefore would not be able to support themselves and their families like other men did. God established a set “contribution” at a specified interval, so that those individuals were taken care of. The “temple tax” would be continuous.

Some modern Christians want to believe that the “compulsory element” of our giving no longer exists since we are under a different law. Certainly, “tithing” as it was counted under the Old Testament law, isn’t required today but we ARE commanded to support those who preach the gospel! (1 Cor. 9: 6–14; Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7; 1 Tim. 5:17–18) We are also told to be generous to those in need. (1 Tim. 6:17–19 ; 2 Cor. 8–9) Certainly, the Israelites gave more than required. Exodus 36:4-5 *“Then all the craftsmen who were doing all the work of the sanctuary came, each from the work he was doing, and they spoke to Moses, saying, ‘The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the LORD commanded us to do.’”*

**Back to the top of Mt. Sinai:**

It isn’t until 25:8 that we learn what will be done with all of these materials. God says, *“And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you – the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so shall you make it.”* (NKJV)

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So... a “sanctuary” is to be built, and it was to be constructed according to the pattern of the “tabernacle,” and the pattern of all its furnishings. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word “tabernacle” as: *“A house of worship: specifically a large building or tent used for evangelistic services.”* The Encyclopedia Britannica adds: *“In Jewish history, the portable place of worship constructed by Moses for the Hebrew tribes during the period of wandering that preceded their arrival into the Promised Land.”*

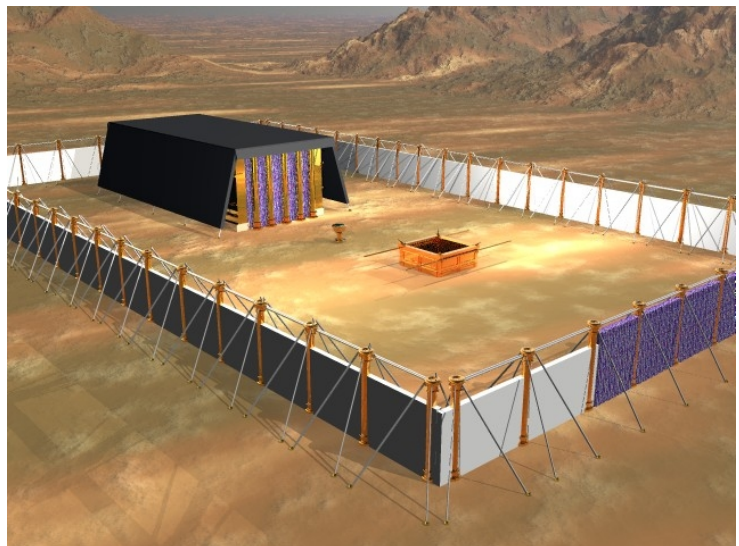
Strong’s Hebrew/English dictionary tells us *“The word ‘tabernacle’ stems from the Hebrew word ‘Mishkan’ which is ‘a residence or a shepherd’s hut;’ properly a tent with wooden walls; typically, a ‘dwelling.’”* While the first two cited dictionaries define “tabernacle” as a place of worship, the third calls it a residence, a shepherd’s hut – a place to live.

Actually, it is both, but the latter does bode the question, *“Did God need a dwelling place?”* Of course not! Isaiah records God saying, ***“...Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made...”*** (Isaiah 66:1)

No, Jehovah’s reason for the sanctuary was not for Him... it was for the people with whom He had a Covenant Relationship so they could understand that He was truly “with” them! God knew the people could more easily understand that kind of relationship if He actually ***“resided”*** among them... and so it was both: His dwelling place on earth, and a place for worship!

This is one of the better images of what is commonly called “the tabernacle,” but actually, the “tabernacle” is only that part under the black covering in this image. The rest is called the “outer courtyard.” I tend to call all that is seen in this image the “Tabernacle Compound.”

We are going to see that it was completed almost exactly nine months after



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the people made those donations mentioned in chapter 25. History tells us this portable “tabernacle,” built from offered materials with skills only God could provide, served as a place of worship for the Israelites during the little over 39 year period of wandering in the wilderness after the tabernacle was completed.

During those 39 years the tabernacle was disassembled, stored for transport, moved to a new location, unpacked and re-erected at the new campsite at least 42 times before they arrived at the Promised Land. Those 42 encampments are listed in the book of Number, Chapter 33.

But that isn't all – After the Israelites took Canaan, the tabernacle was erected in Gilgal for several years (possibly until just before Joshua's death?) then it moved to Shiloh for the next 200 years after that. As a matter of fact: This same tabernacle served as the Israelites place of worship until about 950 BC when King Solomon finished building the first Temple in Jerusalem.

From information we have previously gleaned – and since no delays are mentioned – I believe we can say with confidence that the tabernacle was constructed during the last seven months of the year 1527 BC. (Remember, the night the Israelites left Egypt Jehovah told them ***“This will be the beginning of months for you...”*** thereby changing the calendar so that Nissan became the first month of the year.) They left Ramses just after midnight on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Nissan, and the journey from Ramses to Mount Sinai took 61 - 62 days, so they arrived at Mount Sinai on or about the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> day of Sivan (the third month). Allowing 2 weeks for Moses' previous seven trips up the mountain, would put the date when Moses and Joshua ascended the mountain, on or about the first day of Tammuz (4th month). Forty days later, they would have come down the mountain on or about the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Menachem (5th month). In Exodus 40:2, Jehovah says, ***“On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting...”*** So, those calculations indicate that this structure would have been erected just 15 days short of one year after they left Egypt!

I was not able to find the exact date for the first use of Solomon's temple – just that it was about 950 BC. Using that date to mark the end of the Tabernacle's use, and 1527 BC as the start, we can subtract and end up with 577 years. So, this “temporary” structure was in use for almost 600 years! Was it then torn down? Were the materials, especially the gold and silver, melted down and put in the temple's treasury? Were the altars, table of Showbread, candlestick and other fixtures used



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in the Temple? We aren't told, but we do know the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Temple. We know also, and can be assured that the Tabernacle and what it represented to the Israelites helped them through some very difficult times.

## Part 2 – Instruction for the construction of the Tabernacle and its furniture –

*NOTE: Most of the images I show in this lesson are examples of models that have been built following the artists' understanding of the written descriptions found in scripture. While they obviously may not be exact representations, I believe they are good enough to help us gain a better understanding of what the tabernacle and its furnishings looked like.*

### Acacia Wood –

We read in Exodus 25:5, “...*ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood...*” (Acacia is sometimes more familiarly called “Shittim” wood.) – The text lists three of the materials to be obtained for the tabernacle and its furnishings. I want to emphasize the third because this “Acacia” wood was used throughout the tabernacle. It was, in fact, the base material for many items including the Ark of the Covenant and the poles with which to carry it, the Table of Showbread, and the poles with which to carry it, the boards for the wooden walls of the tabernacle, the bars and pillars for the curtains of both the “tent” as well as the “walls” of the outer court, and for both the Altar of Incense inside the tabernacle and the Altar of Burnt offerings outside in the courtyard, and perhaps, even in other places not specifically mentioned. The photo above is of a tabletop made of acacia wood that has been assembled and finished with clear varnish. As you can see, it tends to be reddish-brown in color with darker veins.



I feel reasonably certain that acacia was not a “random” choice. God selected it because it is a very dense and heavy hardwood that can withstand drastic climatic variations better than other hardwoods. It is the “hardest” of all hardwoods, so it is very durable and resistant to fungi and insect

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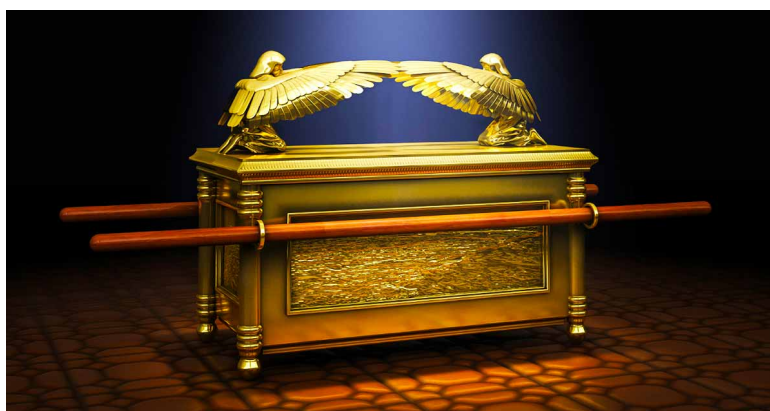
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invasion. It is an ideal wood for outdoor furniture – even better than teak. Its best characteristic is its density and resilience, while at the same time it is also more flexible than other hardwoods. Its durability comes from its extraordinary pattern of growth. The fiber growth in acacia trees is orientated “end on” toward each other as opposed to linear like in most hardwoods. This “multidirectional grain” makes it highly resistant to wear due to friction. Most likely, furniture built of acacia would have quite a long lifespan, especially when completely covered and sealed with gold, as per Jehovah’s instructions.

### The Ark of the Covenant –

The Ark of the Covenant, shown here, is deemed by most historians and commentators to be the most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle. Certainly, it is the first item described by Jehovah. The instructions for construction of the Ark of the Covenant are found in Exodus 25: 10 - 22, and begin with these words, “...*they shall make an ark of acacia wood...*”



Its size is given as 2.5 cubits in length, 1.5 cubits in width, and 1.5 cubits in height. We generally refer to a cubit as being “about 18 inches” but officially it is 17.49 inches. Using the “official” conversion factor, the Ark would measure 43.725 inches long and 26.235 inches wide – that is, a little less than 4 feet long and a little more than 2 feet wide and 2 feet tall (the height and width being equal, not including the cherubim and its top). And of course, it was to be fully overlaid with pure gold, inside and out!

It isn’t mentioned here, but **most** of the items mentioned in this section that were overlaid with gold, silver, bronze or brass were said to be “hammered” rather than melted gold that was poured onto the finished item. It was done by placing a large piece of gold on a hard, flat stone and hammering it

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until it was uniformly the correct thickness. Since gold is soft, this was not a difficult task, but was time consuming. The thin layers of gold were then “formed” onto the object – that is, they covered it and fit it so well that once finished, it looked as if it had been carved or chiseled from a large piece of solid gold!

The instructions go on to say there were to be four rings of gold “cast” for it, meaning that the gold was melted and poured into a form or mold to produce the end item. That item was then bonded (welded) to the Ark using molten gold. There were to be four rings – one for each corner, but attached to the sides instead of the actual corner – two rings on one side, and the other two rings on the other



side. Two poles, long enough to pass through the rings on each side and extend far enough to allow a man to walk in front and behind to carry the ark, were to be made from acacia wood, and they, too, were overlaid with gold – which is not shown in the images here.

Once the poles were placed through the rings on the sides of the ark, notice verse 15 says, ***“The poles shall be in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it!”*** Once slid into place, they were never removed. The Ark was to be carried by Levites only, and once it was consecrated, to touch it was to be struck dead.

God also told Moses that he was to place inside the completed ark the ***“Testimony which I will give you.”*** As we said at the beginning of this lesson, this is most likely the Ten Commandments, but there are some who believe it was the **Book of the Covenant**, and still others believe it was the laws of the covenant, and the agreement between God and the people.

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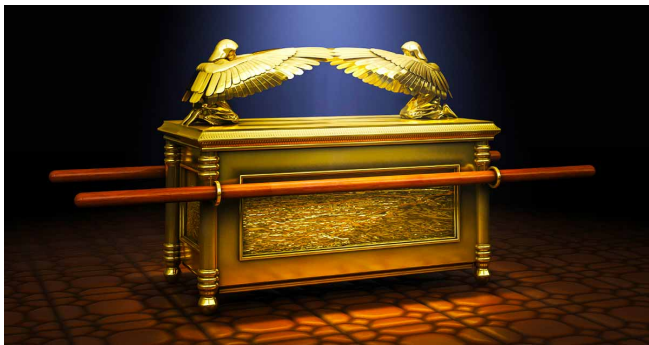
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### The Mercy Seat and the Cherubim –

Probably the most accurate description of the “Mercy Seat” that covered the ark is to call it a “lid” that was kept on the ark. It was made from pure gold (no wood) and it exactly fit the ark. I suspect it was also “hammered” as previously described, and was thick enough to not bend or break.

But this lid alone did not constitute the Mercy Seat: Two ***“cherubim,”*** also made of hammered gold were placed at the two ends of the “lid” and all three were bonded or “welded” together with molten gold so as to become one piece – the “Mercy Seat”. I prefer the image on the left over the one above



because I believe it best depicts what the text says about the Cherubim: They ***“shall stretch out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat.”*** Once all this was done the Mercy Seat was placed on top of the ark. It is from above the Mercy Seat that God will meet with Moses (some believe the High Priest is meant) ***“...And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel.”*** (Ex 25:22)

### The Table for Bread –

The table of Showbread was another item made of acacia wood – its size is given as 2 cubits in length, 1 in width, and 1 ½ in height. The text reads, ***“And you shall overlay it with pure gold, and make***





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*to this a crown of gold all around. And you shall make to it a border of a hand's breadth round about. And you shall make a golden crown to the border of it, all around. And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and put the rings in the four corners that are on the four feet of it. The rings shall be adjoining the border as housings for the staves to carry the table. And you shall make the staves of acacia-wood and overlay them with gold, so that the table may be carried with them. And you shall make its dishes, and its spoons, and its pitchers, and its sacrificial cups with which a drink-offering is made. You shall make them of pure gold. And you shall set upon the table Bread of the Presence before Me always.”*

### The Golden Lampstand –

The Lampstand has always been a slight problem for historians and commentators because of the wording of the text – all the “branches, bowls, knops, flowers, and almonds” – and that the wording can be understood in several different ways. The vast majority of images, though, show something similar to this photo: A rather large and heavy base, with a central shaft with three arms on each side. The candlestick was “hand formed” as Exodus 25:31 says.



Verse 39 of that same chapter tells us the lampstand was made of “a talent” of pure gold. The actual weight of a “talent” varies immensely depending upon the substance and the period of time being discussed. When referring to pure gold it can vary between about 50 of our modern pounds, up to a maximum of 120 pounds. Spence says it was 94 pounds, John Gill says “*the common talent weighed 60 pounds, but the “sacred talent” was double.*” So... 120 pounds. Albert Barnes says 94 pounds. F.B. Meyer doesn’t give a weight, but says “*the candlestick, with its seven branches, cost \$35,000.*” (at the current rate of his time.)

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I scanned the image of Josephus and the candlestick from my copy of Flavius Josephus's *"Antiquities of the Jews."* He was a well known first-century Romano-Jewish historian and military leader. He is best known for

his history *"The Jewish War,"* but his *"Antiquities"* is also often quoted or referenced.



THE GOLDEN CANDLESTICK.

(I think my copy of his book must be the first thing off Gutenberg's printing press because it is very hard to read.)

Notice the size of the candlestick shown in Josephus's book in relation to the man beside it! The size notwithstanding, this being a first-century illustration leads us to conclude that the general

configuration for the candlestick has been around for a long time, and has become the "generally accepted" view of Jewish candlesticks.

Perhaps it is best to compare the two images of the candlestick to the text as it is presented below, and try to get a decent picture of what the candlestick looked like:

*"You shall also make a lampstand of pure gold; the lampstand shall be of hammered work. Its shaft, its branches, its bowls, its ornamental knops, and flowers shall be of one piece. 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. Three bowls shall be made like almond blossoms on one branch, with an ornamental knop and a flower, and three bowls made like almond blossoms on the other branch, with an ornamental knop and a flower – and so for the six branches that come out of the lampstand. On the lampstand itself four bowls shall be made like almond blossoms, each*

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*with its ornamental knop and flower. And there shall be a knop under the first two branches of the same, a knop under the second two branches of the same, and a knop under the third two branches of the same, according to the six branches that extend from the lampstand. Their knops and their branches shall be of one piece; all of it shall be one hammered piece of pure gold. You shall make seven lamps for it, and they shall arrange its lamps so that they give light in front of it. And its wick-trimmers and their trays shall be of pure gold. It shall be made of a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils. And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”*

The instructions for the items meant to go in the Tabernacle are very precise. At no point in any of the descriptions of these things that were to be regarded as holy is there an implied “Suit Yourself.” Could there be a lesson in this for us?

(By the way – I hope I successfully “un-corrected” every incident where spell-checker corrected the word “**knop**” to read “knob.” A “**knop**” is defined as an “**ornamental loop or tuft**.” Sometimes it is said that a piece of material (metal or cloth) would be “twisted” to form a “knop.” And that’s all I know about that.

Next time, we discuss the Tabernacle itself.