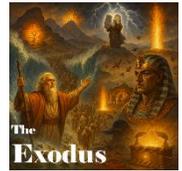




From the Mercy Seat to the Holy Place Exodus 25:23-40 & 30:1-10 (Lesson #27)



Vs 23-25 "You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. 24 You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it. 25 And you shall make a rim around it a handbreadth wide, and a molding of gold around the rim."

Next Yahweh moves to the third piece of furniture. The first piece that is located in the Holy Place. This is located to the right or (north side) when you entered the tabernacle.

Moses is next instructed to make a **table** for the Holy Place, constructed from **acacia wood** (*shittah*), the same durable and rot-resistant wood used throughout the tabernacle furniture. God provides precise dimensions:

- **Length:** 2 cubits (~3 ft), **Width:** 1 cubit (~1.5 ft) **Height:** 1.5 cubits (~2 ft 3 in)

This table would not have been large, but it was significant. It would hold the **Bread of the Presence**—twelve loaves symbolizing the covenant fellowship between God and the twelve tribes of Israel (Lev. 24:5–9).

Vs 24 - The table was to be **overlaid with pure gold**. As with the ark, the use of gold highlights the table's importance and holiness. This was no ordinary piece of furniture—it belonged in the presence of the King.

A **molding of gold** (a decorative border or raised edge) was to be crafted around the perimeter, framing the table with beauty and dignity.

Vs 25 - God also commands an additional **rim** around the table, about a **handbreadth** wide (roughly 3–4 inches). This was a **second golden molding** that was to be placed—another detail reinforcing both beauty and stability.

Vs 26-27 And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs. 27 Close to the frame the rings shall lie, as holders for the poles to carry the table.

Moses is next instructed that the table must have **four rings of gold**, attached at the **four corners**, where its **legs** meet the frame. These rings would function much like the ones used on the ark of the covenant—likely **cast rings** formed by pouring molten gold into molds.

The rings were to be positioned **close to the frame**, meaning they were likely located **near the top of each leg**, near the underside of the tabletop. This ensured that the table could be lifted evenly and securely.

These rings served as **holders for the poles** used to carry the table. Just like the ark, the table had to be transported without being touched directly, which underscores again that holy objects were to be handled according to God's prescribed method.

Commentator R. Alan Cole makes an interesting observation: *“We are fortunate in having, on the Arch of Titus, a carved representation of this table (as well as of the golden lampstand). The model pictured is that from Herod’s Temple but, to judge from the description in Exodus, it followed closely the Exodus pattern.”*

What is he referring to? In A.D. 81, the Roman emperor Domitian built the **Arch of Titus** to commemorate the military victories of his brother Titus—especially the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. On that monument is a sculpted relief showing Roman soldiers carrying away sacred items from the Jerusalem Temple, including:

- the **Table of the Bread of the Presence**,
- the **Golden Lampstand (Menorah)**,
- and other temple treasures.

Even though the carving reflects **Herod’s Temple**, not Moses’ tabernacle, the design appears remarkably consistent with the biblical description—featuring:

- a rectangular gold-covered table, elevated on legs, with rings and carrying poles.

Vs 28 You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these.

Yahweh continues the instructions for the Table of the Bread of the Presence by directing Moses to make **poles** specifically to carry it. Just like the poles used for the ark, these were to be made from **acacia wood** (שִׁטָּה, *shittah*), a wood known for its durability and resistance to decay—ideal for furniture that would be repeatedly transported through the wilderness.

After shaping the poles, they were to be **overlaid with gold**, matching the holiness and value of the table itself. The poles would then be inserted into the golden rings (vv. 26–27), allowing the table to be carried without being touched directly by human hands.

This instruction reinforces a key theme in all of the tabernacle furnishings:
God’s holy things must be handled in God’s holy way.

Vs 29 And you shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. 30 And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly.

Moses is next instructed to make a series of **utensils** that would accompany the table:

- **plates, dishes, flagons (flasks), and bowls** used for **drink offerings**.

All of these were to be made of **pure gold**, matching the holiness of the table itself. These items were not decorative; they supported the priestly ministry performed in the Holy Place.

Their gold composition reflects again that everything associated with God’s presence must be treated as **precious and set apart**.

Moses is then told, “You shall set the **bread of the Presence** on the table before Me regularly.” The Hebrew phrase is literally the “**bread of faces**”—that is, bread set **before the face of God**. It symbolized that the twelve tribes of Israel lived continually **before God’s presence** and under His sustaining care.

According to **Leviticus 24:5–9**, each Sabbath the priests were to place **twelve loaves** of fine flour on the table, arranged in two stacks of six. Frankincense was placed on the bread as a memorial offering. When the bread was replaced weekly, only the priests were permitted to eat the old loaves.

Just as bread is necessary for physical survival, fellowship with God is necessary for spiritual survival. Israel’s life was sustained “before His face.”

How the Table of Showbread Points to Jesus:

- 1) The table and the Bread of the Presence points forward beautifully to Christ: Jesus is the True Bread from Heaven (John 6:32-35).
 - The Bread of the Presence symbolized enduring life and fellowship with God. Jesus embodies this reality—He is the One who sustains our souls and brings us into communion with the Father.
- 2) Jesus Brings Us Before the Face of God
 - The “**bread of faces**” speaks of living before God’s presence. Through Jesus’ atoning sacrifice, we now **stand in God’s presence** without fear (Heb. 10:19–22).
- 3) Jesus Feeds His People at His Table
 - Just as only priests ate the showbread, so now **all believers**, who have been made a “kingdom of priests” (Rev. 1:6), are invited to Christ’s table. In the Lord’s Supper, He feeds us spiritually by His grace.

Vs 31 "You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it.

We now come to the second piece of furniture in the Holy Place, the golden lampstand or as it is known by its Hebrew name the **מְנוֹרָה (m^{nowrah})**. The Kings James translated that word as candlestick which is very unfortunate, it does not have candles, it is a lampstand that is fueled by olive oil.

The **m^{nowrah}**, is located on the left side, the south side when you enter the Holy Place.

Yahweh next gives Moses instructions for crafting the **lampstand (מְנוֹרָה, menorah)**, the object responsible for providing light inside the Holy Place. Unlike the ark and the table—which were made of acacia wood overlaid with gold—the lampstand was to be constructed of **pure, solid gold**. This immediately signals its importance and beauty.

The lampstand was to be made of **hammered work**, meaning that every part of it—its **base**, its **central stem**, its **cups**, its **calyxes**, and its **flower ornaments**—was to be shaped by hand from a single piece of gold. Nothing was to be cast separately and attached. The entire structure was one unified work of craftsmanship.

God intentionally uses **botanical language**, describing cups shaped like **almond blossoms**, along with **calyxes** (the protective leafy structures beneath a flower) and ornate **flowers**. These details evoke the imagery of a **tree**, particularly a tree in bloom.

At this point we don't yet have the full description (that comes in vv. 32–40), but already the picture is emerging:

- A **base**, a **main stem**, multiple **branches**, cups shaped like **blossoms**, **flowers** and **calyxes**.

A lampstand that looks like a **golden tree**, radiating light. This is no accident. The lampstand will soon be shown to have **seven lamps**, likely representing a stylized **tree of life**, providing perpetual light in the Holy Place.

Just as the tabernacle is a microcosm of Eden restored, the lampstand becomes a golden reminder of God's life-giving presence.

Vs 32-33 And there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; 33 three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch — so for the six branches going out of the lampstand.

Yahweh now gives further detail about the structure of the lampstand. From the central stem—what we might call the **main shaft**—there were to be **six branches**, three extending from each side. These branches create the familiar seven-light design: one central lamp with three branches on the right and three on the left.

This means that the lampstand displayed a total of **18 almond-blossom cups** on the branches alone (3 cups per branch × 6 branches), each cup decorated with detailed plant imagery.

The effect is unmistakable: **the lampstand is designed to resemble a blooming, fruitful tree.**

The almond tree is the **earliest tree to bloom** in Israel after winter. Its blossoms symbolize:

- life, vigilance, renewal, **and** the nearness of spring.

This is **Eden restored in miniature**—a reminder that God is the source of life, light, and fruitfulness. The lampstand illuminated the Holy Place, symbolizing that **life and light come from God alone.**

Vs 34 And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups made like almond blossoms, with their calyxes and flowers,

The lampstand itself will have four cups.

- **18** almond-blossom cups on the branches (3 per branch × 6 branches)
- **+ 4** almond-blossom cups on the central stem
- = **22 almond-blossom cups**, each with its own **calyx** and **flower**.

The lampstand was not simply functional—it was theologically symbolic. It represented the **life-giving** and **light-bearing presence** of God dwelling in the midst of His people.

Vs 35 and a calyx of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out from the lampstand.

God adds another level of detail to the design. Beneath each **pair** of the six side branches (meaning each set of two branches extending from the central stem), there was to be an additional **calyx**, made of one piece with the lampstand itself.

These calyxes likely functioned as decorative **support structures**—visually connecting the branches to the main shaft and enhancing the tree-like design.

The calyx beneath each branch pair unifies the structure beautifully, emphasizing the organic, tree-like shape of the menorah.

Vs 36 Their calyxes and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single piece of hammered work of pure gold.

God emphasizes again that **every part** of the lampstand—its branches, its calyxes, its flowers, its cups—must be fashioned as **one unified piece** of hammered gold. Nothing is to be attached later. No joints. No welds. No separately constructed branches.

This is staggering craftsmanship. The lampstand was not only elaborate—it required an extraordinary level of artistic skill, technical precision, and physical labor. The artisans God appointed—especially **Bezalel** (Ex. 31:1–5)—would need wisdom, understanding, and Spirit-empowered ability to execute this design.

Vs 37 You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it.

The final functional instruction for the lampstand concerns its purpose: **light**. Moses is told to make **seven lamps**—one for each branch of the menorah. These lamps would sit atop the almond-blossom cups and would be filled with oil, their wicks burning continually.

These seven lamps provided the **only source of light** inside the Holy Place. There were no windows. No natural light.

This lampstand imagery shows up again in a very surprising place (Revelations chapter 4).

The imagery is striking:

- **Seven flames**
- Before God's presence
- Representing the **fullness and perfection of the Holy Spirit**

This parallel is deliberate. The menorah in the tabernacle was not merely functional—it was typological. It pointed forward to the **Holy Spirit's illuminating and life-giving ministry** in the presence of God.

How Does the Menorah Point to Jesus?

- 1) Jesus is the Light of the World (John 8:12).
 - In the darkness of the Holy Place, the menorah provided the only light. In the darkness of this world, **Christ alone** gives true spiritual light. The menorah was a **symbol**; Jesus is the **substance**.
- 2) Jesus Is the True Tree of Life (John 15:1)
 - The menorah's design—a blossoming tree crowned with light—echoes Eden's Tree of Life. Christ restores what Adam forfeited; through Him we have:
 - eternal life, spiritual nourishment, restored access to God's presence

SO YOU KNOW:

Some may wonder why today's Jewish menorah has **eight** branches (plus a ninth "servant" light). That is the **Hanukkah menorah**—a later development commemorating the Maccabean rededication of the temple (2nd century B.C.).

Vs 38-40 Its tongs and their trays shall be of pure gold. 39 It shall be made, with all these utensils, out of a talent of pure gold. 40 And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain."

In addition to the lampstand itself, Moses is instructed to make the **tongs** and **trays** used for maintaining the seven lamps. These tools were essential for trimming the wicks, removing ashes, replenishing oil, and keeping the lamps burning continually. And like the lampstand, they too were to be made of **pure gold**.

God then reveals an astonishing detail:

All of this—the lampstand and every accessory—was to be crafted out of a talent of pure gold.

How much is a talent?

- A **talent** represents **3,000 shekels**.
- In modern weight, one talent equals roughly **75 pounds** (about 34 kilograms).

This means the menorah and its utensils were made from a massive amount of gold—somewhere in the range of **75 pounds** of solid, hammered gold. Even at conservative estimates, this would make the lampstand one of the most precious single items in the entire tabernacle.

The weight underscores:

- The **value of God's presence**, the **importance of divine light**, and the **extravagant beauty** God commanded for His sanctuary.

Vs 40 - God concludes the instructions with a solemn directive that has been repeated a number of times. The word translated "**pattern**" is **תְּבִינָה (tabnith)**, meaning:

- pattern
- blueprint
- model
- form *or* likeness

In other words, Yahweh did not simply give Moses verbal descriptions— It seems He may have **showed Moses the heavenly pattern** on Mount Sinai. The tabernacle and its furnishings were not human inventions; they were earthly **copies of heavenly realities** (Heb. 8:5).

Now for some reason, Moses does not discuss or describe the Altar of Incense. He will in Exodus 30:1-10, so to complete our understanding of the items located in the Holy Place, I will pull those verse forward for our discussion.

Here in Exodus 30, we find the instructions for the golden altar of incense. The altar is located in the Holy Place, in front of the veil. When you walk into the temple it would be the thing that is immediately in front of you.

30:1 "You shall make an altar on which to burn incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. 2 A cubit shall be its length, and a cubit its breadth. It shall be square, and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it.

The instructions for the **altar of incense** begin with the familiar pattern of sacred craftsmanship: The ark too is constructed of **acacia wood**.

Its repeated use throughout the tabernacle furnishings underscores the unity and intentionality of God's design. Nothing in the sanctuary is arbitrary; each piece participates in a coherent theology of holiness, beauty, and permanence.

The altar's dimensions are modest:

Width = 1 cubit (~ 1 ft 6 in), Length = 1 cubit (~ 1 ft 6 in), Height = 2 cubits (~ 3 foot).

Its small footprint contrasts with the much larger bronze altar outside the tent, reminding us that this altar serves a different purpose. Whereas the outer altar deals with **atonement** through sacrifice, this inner altar is devoted to **intercession** through incense.

The distinction anticipates a biblical pattern: **cleansing precedes communion; atonement opens the way for prayer** (Ps 141:2; Heb 10:19–22).

The text notes that the altar's **horns** are to be **"of one piece with it."** Horns in the ancient Near East symbolized strength, authority, and protection.

The fact that the horns are not added on but formed as one piece emphasizes the altar's integrity and wholeness.

Historically, incense altars were common in the ancient world, but Israel's altar is distinct in both placement and purpose. It stands not as a magical device to manipulate deity—as in pagan temples—but as a **symbol of covenant relationship**.

The incense offered here is prescribed, holy, and tied to God's revealed will (Ex 30:34–38). Its rising smoke becomes a visual metaphor for the prayers of God's people ascending to Him (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8; 8:3–4).

Thus, even the architecture of the tabernacle teaches Israel that communion with God is a gift of grace, mediated through His appointed means.

APPLICATION: This passage invites us to consider the beauty and seriousness of prayer. The careful construction of this altar reminds us that prayer is not casual or peripheral but central to the life of God’s people. It is a privilege secured by atonement and sustained by God’s own provision.

Vs 3-4 You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and around its sides and its horns. And you shall make a molding of gold around it. 4 And you shall make two golden rings for it. Under its molding on two opposite sides of it you shall make them, and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it.

The altar of incense, like the ark and the table of the bread of the Presence, is to be **overlaid with pure gold**.

The text emphasizes the totality of this covering—its top, sides, and even its horns are wrapped in gold. This complete overlay signals the altar’s proximity to the **Most Holy Place** and its role in the ministry of intercession.

A **gold molding**, sometimes translated “**crown**”, is to be fashioned around the top. This decorative border mirrors the design of the ark and the table (Ex 25:11, 24), creating a visual unity among the sacred furnishings.

The repetition of this “crown” motif subtly reinforces the theme of God’s kingship dwelling among His people. The sanctuary is not merely a tent; it is the earthly throne room of the divine King (Ps 99:1).

Vs 4 - instructs that **two golden rings**, these rings serve as holders for the **carrying poles**, just as with the ark and the table.

The careful instructions for rings and poles also highlight the altar’s **ongoing function**. This is not a decorative object but a working instrument of worship. The people may be on the move, but communion with God remains central and constant.

Vs 5-6 You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 6 And you shall put it in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you.

The poles for carrying the altar are again to be made of **acacia wood** and overlaid with gold, matching the construction of the ark and the table.

Vs 6 - gives the altar’s placement with striking precision: it is to stand “**before the veil**”, “in the face of” or “directly opposite.”

The text repeats this phrase three times: the altar is before the veil, which is before the ark of the testimony, which is before the mercy seat.

This triple repetition draws a straight line from the altar of incense to the **very heart of the sanctuary**. Though the altar stands in the Holy Place, it is **oriented toward and connected with the mercy seat**, the symbolic throne of God’s presence.

The verse concludes with one of the most profound statements in the tabernacle instructions, we read this of the mercy seat last week, here it is repeated: “*where I will meet with you.*”

God locates His meeting place not in the ingenuity of human worship but in the space He Himself defines—above the ark, at the mercy seat, mediated through the structures He commands.

The altar of incense, positioned just outside the veil, participates in this meeting by symbolizing the prayers of God’s people rising toward His throne (Psalm 141:2; Revelation 5:8; 8:3–4).

This placement also explains the altar’s role on the **Day of Atonement**. Though normally outside the Holy of Holies, on that day the high priest takes coals from this altar and brings incense inside the veil so that the cloud of incense covers the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:12–13). The altar of incense thus becomes the bridge between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, between daily intercession and annual atonement. It stands as a perpetual reminder that access to God requires both cleansing and mediation.

The New Testament sees in this altar a rich foreshadowing of Christ’s priestly ministry.

- 1) **Christ as the true intercessor:** The rising incense represents prayer, and Christ is the One whose intercession continually ascends before the Father (Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34).
- 2) **Christ as the veil-opener:** The altar stands before the veil, but Christ’s death tears the veil and grants direct access to God (Mat 27:51; Heb 10:19–22).
- 3) **Christ as the meeting place:** God meets His people at the mercy seat; Christ becomes the true *hilastērion* (ἱλαστήριον), the “propitiation” or “mercy seat”—through His blood (Rom 3:25).

In Christ, the symbolism of the incense altar is not discarded but fulfilled. Prayer, access, and atonement (mercy seat) converge in Him.

Vs 7-8 And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, 8 and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations.

Aaron’s daily ministry at the altar of incense establishes a rhythm of worship that frames Israel’s life before God. Each morning, as he “**dresses the lamps**”—that is, trims, replenishes, and tends the seven lamps of the golden lampstand—he is to burn **fragrant incense** upon the altar.

The rising smoke becomes a visible symbol of Israel’s prayers ascending to God at the start of each new day.

At **twilight**, when Aaron “**sets up the lamps**” for the evening, he again burns incense. The Hebrew verb here suggests preparing or causing the lamps to ascend—an image that pairs naturally with the ascending incense.

Morning and evening, light and fragrance, illumination and intercession: the sanctuary’s daily rhythm embodies the truth that God’s people live continually before His face.

This twice-daily offering is called a “**regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations.**”

The word *tāmîd* (תָּמִיד), translated “**regular**” or “**continual**,” is a key term in the tabernacle vocabulary.

It describes the perpetual bread on the table (Exodus 25:30), the continual burnt offering (Exodus 29:38–42), and the ever-burning lampstand (Exodus 27:20). Together, these “continual” elements express the constancy of Israel’s covenant relationship with God.

Worship is not occasional or sporadic; it is woven into the daily life of the nation.

Theologically, the morning-and-evening incense offering anticipates the biblical theme of **unceasing prayer** (I Thes 5:17).

Vs 9-10 You shall not offer unauthorized incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it. 10 Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year. With the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD."

The Lord now gives **prohibitions** that guard the holiness of the altar of incense.

First, Israel is commanded not to offer **“unauthorized incense”**—literally, “strange” or “foreign” incense. The incense burned on this altar must conform exactly to the recipe God will reveal in (Ex 30:34–38).

The second prohibition forbids offering **burnt offerings, grain offerings, or drink offerings** on this altar. Those sacrifices belong exclusively to the **bronze altar** in the courtyard (Ex 27:1–8). The altar of incense has a distinct purpose: not sacrifice but **intercession**.

Its function is not to consume offerings but to send up the fragrant symbol of prayer. This separation of roles reinforces the theological structure of the tabernacle: **atonement outside, communion inside**. Only after sin is dealt with at the bronze altar can the worshiper draw near symbolically through the incense altar.

Vs 10 - introduces the altar’s annual purification: **“Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year.”**

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest applies the blood of the sin offering to these horns (Lev 16:18–19).

This act cleanses the altar from the impurities of Israel’s worship and maintains its fitness for intercession. Even the altar of prayer requires atonement, reminding Israel that **sin affects every aspect of life and worship**, and that access to God must always be mediated through blood (Heb 9:22).

The text concludes with the declaration: **“It is most holy to the LORD.”** The phrase marks the highest degree of sanctity in the tabernacle system. The altar of incense, though not inside the Holy of Holies, shares in its holiness because of its proximity to the mercy seat and its role in the ministry of prayer.

Closing Comments:

The instructions for the altar of incense bring to completion the description of the furnishings within the **tabernacle proper**, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.

The tabernacle was the place where **atonement was remembered, celebrated, and enjoyed**, but not the place where atonement was *made*.

The actual atoning work occurs at the bronze altar in the courtyard, where blood was shed. Inside the tent, the focus shifts from sacrifice to **communion**—from the shedding of blood to the enjoyment of God’s presence through light, bread, and incense.