



*“The Glory of the Lord Upon the Mountain “ by Larson*

***Verse 3***

***When Moses went and told the people all the Lord’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, “Everything the Lord has said we will do.”***

***“When Moses went and told the people all the Lord’s words and laws...”*** - In the aftermath of the people’s fearful unwillingness to stand before God themselves (20:19) the prophet had been commanded to “set before them” (21:1) the laws which God had presented to him upon the mountain. Moses now fulfills that commission as the mediator of the covenant. The “Lord’s words and laws” are most probably a distinction between the Ten Commandments (“the Ten Words” Exodus 20:1) and all of the other covenant stipulations which had been given thus far. The response of the people is immediate and unanimous – “with one voice.” The “set phrase of commitment” (Durham, p. 343) “Everything the Lord has said we will do” had previously been declared in 19:8 and would be repeated again in 24:7. Their acceptance of the covenant would now be formally enacted in the customary rituals and ceremonies.

***Verse 4***

***Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel.***

***“Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said.”*** - Having attained the assent of the people to the covenant which God had set before them, Moses proceeded to record the

verbal presentation which he had set before the people. *“Part of the process of ratifying a covenant in the ancient Near East entailed putting the agreement in writing. The document served as a testimonial to the treaty and its various specific elements.”* (Currid, II, p. 134) The written contract made the agreement a legal reality, binding upon both parties. At the same time, the recording of the covenant indicated the permanence of this agreement. This was a matter which did not merely pertain to those who were present at Sinai to hear its oral presentation. This covenant between God and the nation of Israel would remain in effect for countless generations still to come. Given the vital interest of posterity in these words, Cassuto speculates that Moses may have inscribed the text in stone. This document would be referred to as ***“the Book of the Covenant”*** (Hebrew – *“sefer ha-berith”*) in Verse 7. Moses would continue this pattern of writing down the words and commands of God throughout his ministry. The ultimate result of that effort would come to be known as the *“Torah.”* The prophet emphasized the central role that document was to have in the life of the nation of Israel in his closing words to the people:

***“So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord and to all the elders of Israel. Then Moses commanded them: ‘At the end of every seven years, in the year of cancelling debts, when Israel comes to appear the Lord your God at the place He will choose, you shall read this Law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people - men, women and children and the aliens living in your towns - so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this Law. Their children who do not know the words of this Law must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.’”***  
(Deuteronomy 31:9-13)

Joshua carefully observed this command during his leadership of the nation:

***“Afterward Joshua read all the words of the Law - the blessings and the curses - just as it is written in the Book of the Law. There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them.”*** (Joshua 8:34-35)

Later, in the days of King Josiah late in the divided kingdom, the forgotten Book of the Covenant was discovered during the cleansing of the temple and the ancient practice was restored:

***“Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the Temple of the Lord with the men of Judah, the people of all greatest. He read in their***

*hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. The King stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord – to follow the Lord and keep His commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and with all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.”* (2 Kings 23: 1-3; cf. also Nehemiah 8:8, 18)

*“He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain...”*

Having obtained the verbal consent of the people to the covenant agreement, Moses proceeded to formal implementation of the covenant. The text specifies five preliminary actions - the altar, the twelve stone pillars, animal sacrifices, blood application, and the reading of the written document stipulating the terms of the contract between the two parties. The fact that Moses *“got up early the next morning”* is noted to convey the urgency with the which this crucial matter was viewed. This was the very first thing to be done that day. *“Moses rose up early in the morning* of the following day, for the implementation of an important matter of this kind could not be delayed until other things had been attended to on that day.” (Cassutto, p. 311) The altar which he *“built”* was, no doubt, constructed in conformity with the design which God had already sanctioned in 20:24-26. The altar upon which the sacrifices would be offered became the physical assurance of God’s presence, as He had promised – *“I will come to you and I will bless you.”* (20:24) In that sense, the altar became the counterpart of the twelve pillars which would represent the tribes of Israel. *“In the ceremony to be performed, the altar will represent the glory of the Lord, whilst the pillars will represent the tribes of Israel; the two contracting parties will stand facing each other.”* (Cassutto, p. 311) That altar was located *“at the foot of the mountain,”* literally *“under the mountain,”* outside the perimeter which barred the people from transgressing the sanctity of the mountain’s holy ground.

*“And set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel.”* - As previously noted (23 :24), the standing stones of Canaanite idolatry were emphatically denounced by



*“Hilkiah, the High Priest Reading the Book of the Covenant to King Josiah” – 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration*

the prophets throughout the Old Testament. These stones were emblematic of the potency of the gods and believed to contain the divine spirits in a way that enabled them to convey blessings to those who worshiped the idol through the stone. These **“twelve stone pillars”** serve a completely different function, representing the tribes of Israel and standing as a permanent memorial to the covenant into which they had entered with the Lord at this place. Joshua built a memorial of twelve stones from the bed of the Jordan to commemorate the miraculous parting of the water before the Ark of the Covenant:

***“So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed, one from each tribe, and said to them: ‘Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone upon his shoulder according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites. In the future when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.”*** (Joshua 4:4 - 7)

At the end of the conquest, Joshua conducted a similar ceremony at Shechem and erected a huge memorial stone to commemorate what the Lord had done and reaffirm the covenant which had been established at Sinai:

***“On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he drew up for them decrees and laws. And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up under***



***“Elijah and Prophets of Baal” by Lucas Cranach***

***the oak near the holy place of the Lord. ‘See,’ he said to all the people. ‘This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words that the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.’”*** (Joshua 24:25-27)

The prophet Elijah also utilized the symbolism of the twelve stones in the construction of his altar upon Mount Carmel in his dramatic confrontation with King Ahab and the prophets of Baal. In this context, the prophet's action would have been particularly poignant because it reaffirmed the covenant unity of all the twelve tribes at a time when the nation was divided between the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah: ***“Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, ‘Your name shall be Israel.’ With the stones he built an altar in the Name of the Lord.”*** (1 Kings 18:31-32)

#### ***Verses 5-6***

***Then he sent young Israelite men and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls and the other half he sprinkled on the altar.***

***"Then he sent young Israelite men and they offered ... "*** - The Levitical priesthood had not yet been established. Therefore Moses simply selected able bodied young men to carry out the sacrifices under his own supervision. Some have argued that these were all first born males, following the practice of other Near Eastern cults. St. Augustine suggested that these men were the sons of Aaron. However, the text indicates no particular criteria for their selection, so all of this must remain in the realm of speculation.

The national covenant between God and the Children of Israel had to be sealed in blood in a manner designed to foreshadow the once for all sacrifice of the Son of God upon the cross. This sacrificial offering is the only such ceremony in the Old Testament that was never repeated. It became the foundation of all that was to follow and clearly outlined the nature and scope of the divine plan of salvation of humanity. Alfred Edersheim does not exaggerate in the least when he hails this event as ***“the most important in the whole history of Israel:***

***“This transaction was the most important in the whole history of Israel. By this one sacrifice, never renewed, Israel was formally set apart as the people of God; and it lay at the foundation of all the sacrificial worship which followed. Only after it did God institute the tabernacle, the priesthood, and all its services. Thus, this one sacrifice prefigured the one sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ for His Church, which is the ground of our access to God and the foundation of all our worship and service.”*** (Edersheim p. 120)

The fundamental truth expressed in these blood sacrifices is that no sinful man can stand before the holy and righteous God without atonement for his sin. All of the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed forward to and were fulfilled/empowered by the once for all sacrifice of God's Son. 17<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran theologian David Chytraeus has correctly noted: *“Each and every sacrifice of the Old Testament was a sermon on the sacrifice and benefits of Christ.”* (Montgomery, p. 60) The Epistle of Hebrews explained this necessity with specific application to Exodus 24:

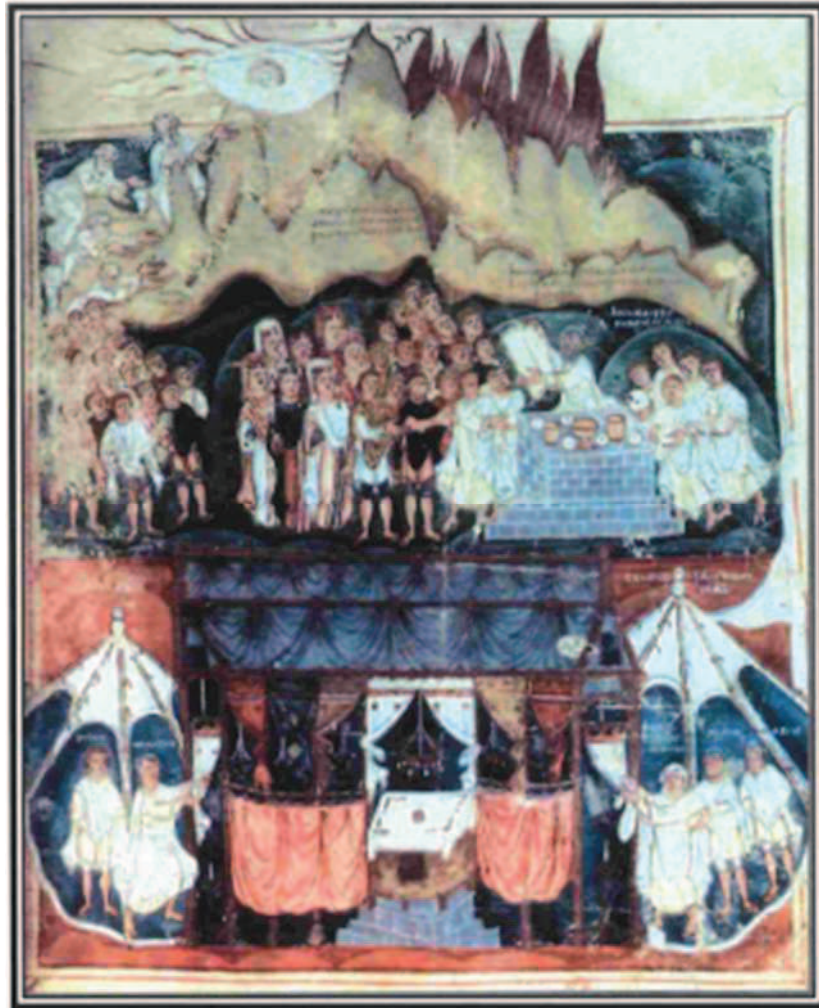
*“For this reason, Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance - now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is only in force when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who made it is living. This why even the first covenant was not put into effect without blood. When Moses had proclaimed every commandment of the Law to all the people, he took the blood of calves,*

*together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop and sprinkled the scroll and all the people. He said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you to keep’ ... The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”* (Hebrews 9:15 - 22)



*Woodcut of Moses Sprinkling the Blood Upon the Alter at Sinai by Christoph Weigel - 1730*

*“They offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord.”* - Two different types of sacrifices were offered. The first, *“burnt offering”* is a sacrifice in which the entire animal is consumed by the fire upon the altar. The Hebrew term for such a sacrifice is *“holah”* from which - by way of Latin and Old French - the English term *“holocaust”* (*“totally burned up or destroyed”*) is derived. In contemporary usage this word is most often used of the Nazi attempt to destroy the entire Jewish population of Europe. This was the propitiatory sacrifice, the innocent life which paid the full penalty for the guilty thereby



*“Israel At Sinai” – 7<sup>th</sup> Century Illumination*

righteous wrath. The perfect, unblemished animal of the sacrifice typified the perfect Son of God. The **“fellowship offerings”** (Hebrew – *“shelamim”* - literally *“the offering of well being”* or *“greeting”* - indicated the restoration of harmony between God and those on whose behalf the blood had been shed. In this instance, portions of the animal were burned on the altar while the rest was reserved for the ritual fellowship banquet to follow.

*“Since without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22), making a visible display of the blood from an animal killed for sacrificial purposes, highlights for all to see the concept of atoning death. Such vivid reminders helped the Israelites keep in mind the source and nature of their forgiveness and acceptance: God and His grace (as He allows the slain animal to substitute for the sinner, based on the eventual perfect sacrifice of Christ, to which all OT sacrifices point and upon which all OT sacrifices depend for their ultimate validity.) (Stuart, p. 554)*

**“Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls and the other half he sprinkled on the altar.”** - The ritual enactment of this theology came in the literal application of the sacrificial blood upon the altar - covering over the sins of the people as in the later ceremony

of the Day of Atonement in which the blood would be sprinkled on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant - and the subsequent sprinkling of the blood on the people themselves.

*“Half of the blood of the sacrifices was put into basins, with the other half the altar was sprinkled, thus making reconciliation with God. Then the terms of the covenant were once more read in the hearing of all, and the other half of the blood, by which reconciliation had been made, sprinkled on the people with these words – ‘Behold the blood of the covenant which Jehovah hath made with you upon these terms.’ As a nation Israel was now reconciled and set apart unto God, both having been accomplished by the blood of the sprinkling.”* (Edersheim, p. 120)

The **"bowls"** in which Moses placed the blood were large deep two handled basins. Archeologists have uncovered similar ceremonial vessels. Given the amount of blood needed for these rituals the bowls in questions would have to have been of significant size and number.

#### **Verses 7-8**

***Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded; ‘We will do everything the Lord has said. We will obey.’ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”***

***“Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people”*** - In between the sprinkling of the blood on the altar and the people, Moses read the recorded Book of the Covenant to the assembly. The Hebrews commentary on the event adds the insight that the blood was also sprinkled on the book itself. This formalized repetition of the details of the agreement redefined the substance of the covenant and eliminated the possibility that at some future point a claim of ignorance might be put forward as an excuse for disobedience or unfaithfulness. The people’s response is, if anything, more emphatic than their answer to the verbal proclamation. They repeat their former affirmation ***“We will do everything that the Lord has said.”*** Their words are all inclusive – ***“We will do everything.”*** There are no exclusions, exemptions or escape clauses, nor can there be when we are dealing with God and His Word. At the same time the people acknowledge their recognition that the Lord Himself (*“Jahweh”*) is the source of this covenant agreement. In addition to their earlier affirmation, they add the phrase ***“We will obey.”*** Nahum Sarna contends that this final declaration is added now because this will be the culmination and conclusion of the people’s direct participation in the ceremony: *“Since this is the last act of public participation, the formula of consent is expanded to give it finality.”* (Sarna, p. 152) Later rabbis would suggest that ***“We will do everything”*** applied to the laws that had already been given while ***“We will obey”*** referred to the commands which were still to be revealed. This would appear to be an artificial attempt to justify the repetition of the text.





*“Moses Reading The Book of the Covenant Before the Alter and Twelve Stones”  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Luther Bible Engraving*

***“Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said ...”*** - As previously noted, the sprinkling of the blood upon the people, signified their cleansing by the propitiatory sacrifices. Hebrews 10 contrasts the endless repetition of the animal sacrifices of the old covenant with the once for all sacrifice of Christ and alludes to this ceremony:

***“We have been holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.”*** (Hebrews 10:10, 19 - 22)

The apostle also refers to the Christians of Asia Minor as blood sprinkled people: ***“Who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood.”*** (1 Peter 1:2) John continues the image of cleansing blood in the visions of Revelation. ***“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”*** (Revelation 7:14) The ***“blood of the***

**covenant**” indicates the consecration of the nation to God and the means by which they have been set apart in terms of the promise given in Exodus 19:4 - 6

***“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagle’s wings and brought you to Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all the nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. “***

The same joint application of blood to the altar and the people can be seen in the ceremony of ordination for Aaron and his sons as they were consecrated for the Levitical priesthood.

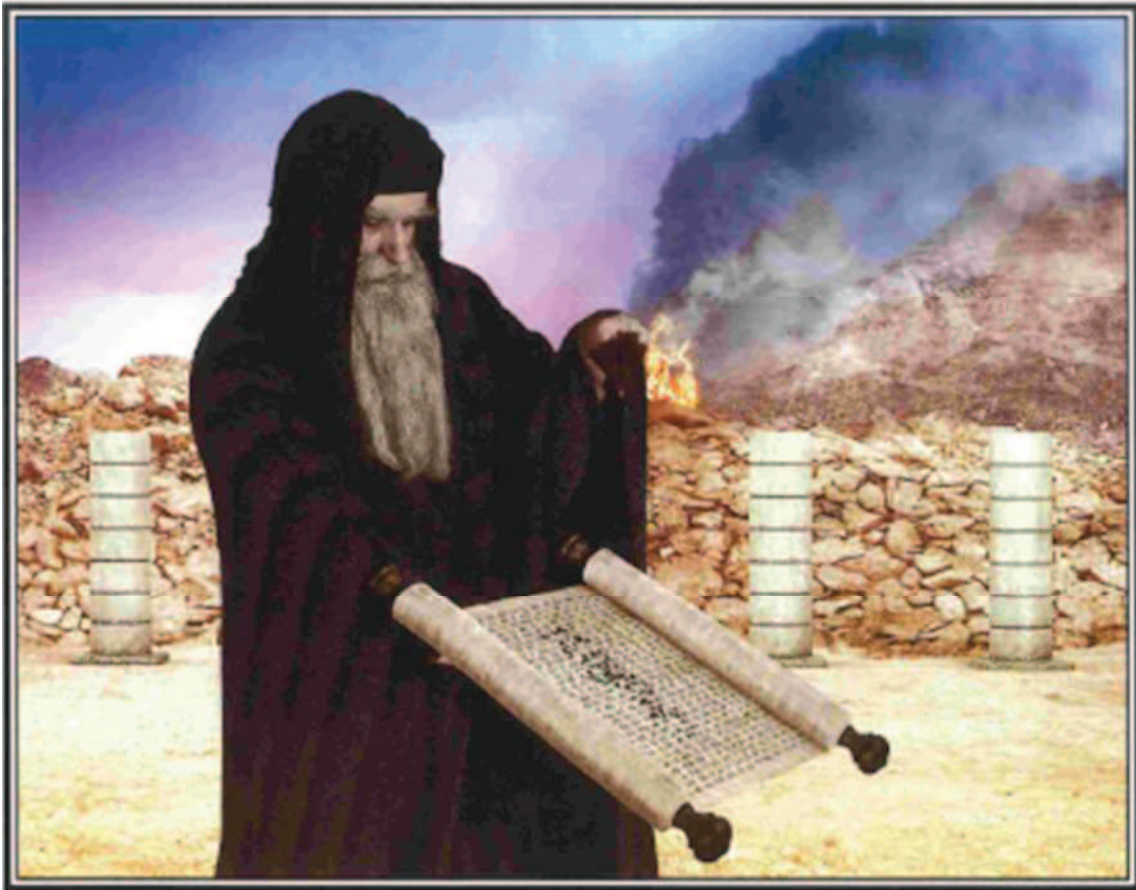
***“Take the other ram and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. Slaughter it and take some of its blood and put it on the lobes of the right ears of Aaron and his sons, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. Then sprinkle blood against the altar on all sides. And take some of the blood on the altar and the anointing oil and sprinkle it on Aaron and on his garments and on his sons and on their garments. Then he and his sons and their garments shall be consecrated. “***  
(Exodus 29:19 - 21)

The cleansing blood of the sacrifice enables the sinner to enter the sacred presence of God without harm. This was the function of the priestly cleansing in the ordination ritual and of the national cleansing here described:

***“In 19:6 Yahweh promised to make Israel ‘a priest’s kingdom and a holy nation.’ The prerogative of holy priesthood is to approach God without suffering harm. The blood of Exodus 24 functions like the blood applied to the priest in 29:20 - 21; it is symbolic of the life that confers protection from the divine presence. From Sinai onward, all Israel is Yahweh’s priest kingdom and holy nation. In confirmation that the right of passage has been efficacious, Exodus 24 describes Israel’s representative elders beholding God unscathed.”*** (Propp, II, 309)

Given the magnitude of the assembly of Israel, some commentators suggest that the blood may actually have been sprinkled upon the seventy elders the representatives of the people or upon the twelve stone pillars which signified the tribes. The correspondence between the blood on both the altar and the stones, which symbolized God and Israel respectively, would have been most appropriate. In any case, the point of the action would have remained the same whether all the people, their representatives, or the tribal pillars were sprinkled.

***“This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with***



*“Moses Sprinkling the Blood Upon the Book of the Covenant” – Larson*

*all these words*” - The agreement to which they had given their assent was **“the covenant which the Lord has made with you.”** That contract was defined by God Himself – **“in accordance with all these words.”** Again, the terminology is deliberately comprehensive – **“all these words.”** Moses also explained the significance of the blood which was being sprinkled as the basis for the covenant which had been established. The essential role of blood sacrifice as the foundation of the covenant was defined as the prophet identified that blood as **“the blood of the covenant.”** Our Lord explicitly referred to these words in the Words of Institution as He declared: **“This is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”** (Matthew 26:28) By repeating Moses’ words from Sinai at the Last Supper on the eve of His death, Christ was identifying God’s national covenant with Israel as an anti type, that is, a foreshadowing, of the salvation covenant by which God would accomplish the forgiveness and the salvation of sinful mankind through the once for all sacrifice of His only-begotten Son upon the cross. *“When the old covenant had served its purpose, the vicarious life and death of the Mediator of the new covenant actualized the atonement that the animal sacrifices symbolized and foreshadowed.”* (Roehrs, p. 79) This understanding of the relationship between the covenants is thoroughly Biblical and serves to demonstrate the unity of Scripture in Jesus Christ. The New Testament repeatedly asserts that persons, actions, events and institutions of the Old Testament were deliberately designed by God to prefigure their fulfillment in the ministry of Christ and in His relationship with His church.



*“God Coming to Moses and the Elders Upon Sinai” – Larson*

### *Verses 9-11*

*Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise His hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God and they ate and drank.*

*“Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu.. “ - With the completion of the ceremonies before the people at the foot of the Mount Sinai, the seventy-four representatives of the nation ascend part of the way up the mountain to come before the Lord. This remarkable experience is unique in the history of Israel. While other prophets - most notably Ezekiel and Isaiah - received visions which included manifestations of God, in this case a group of seventy-four men - the collective leadership of the Israelite people - actually stood in God’s presence to formalize His covenant with their nation. The unique nature of the event is indicative of the unique significance of that which is taking place at this moment. The Hebrew in Verse 9 – **“and saw the God of Israel”** specifically refers to ordinary visual perception with one’s eyes. The broader term, which can be used of normal seeing or the visionary experience of a prophet, is used subsequently in Verse 11 – **“they saw God.”** Many commentators across the centuries, beginning with the oldest rabbinic traditions, have shied away from the literal meaning of the verbs because of the emphatic, repeated assertions of the Old Testament that no sinful human being can actually see God and survive the experience. After wrestling with the Angel of the Lord, Jacob marveled: **“So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying: ‘It is because I saw God face to face and yet my life was spared.’”** (Genesis 32:30)*

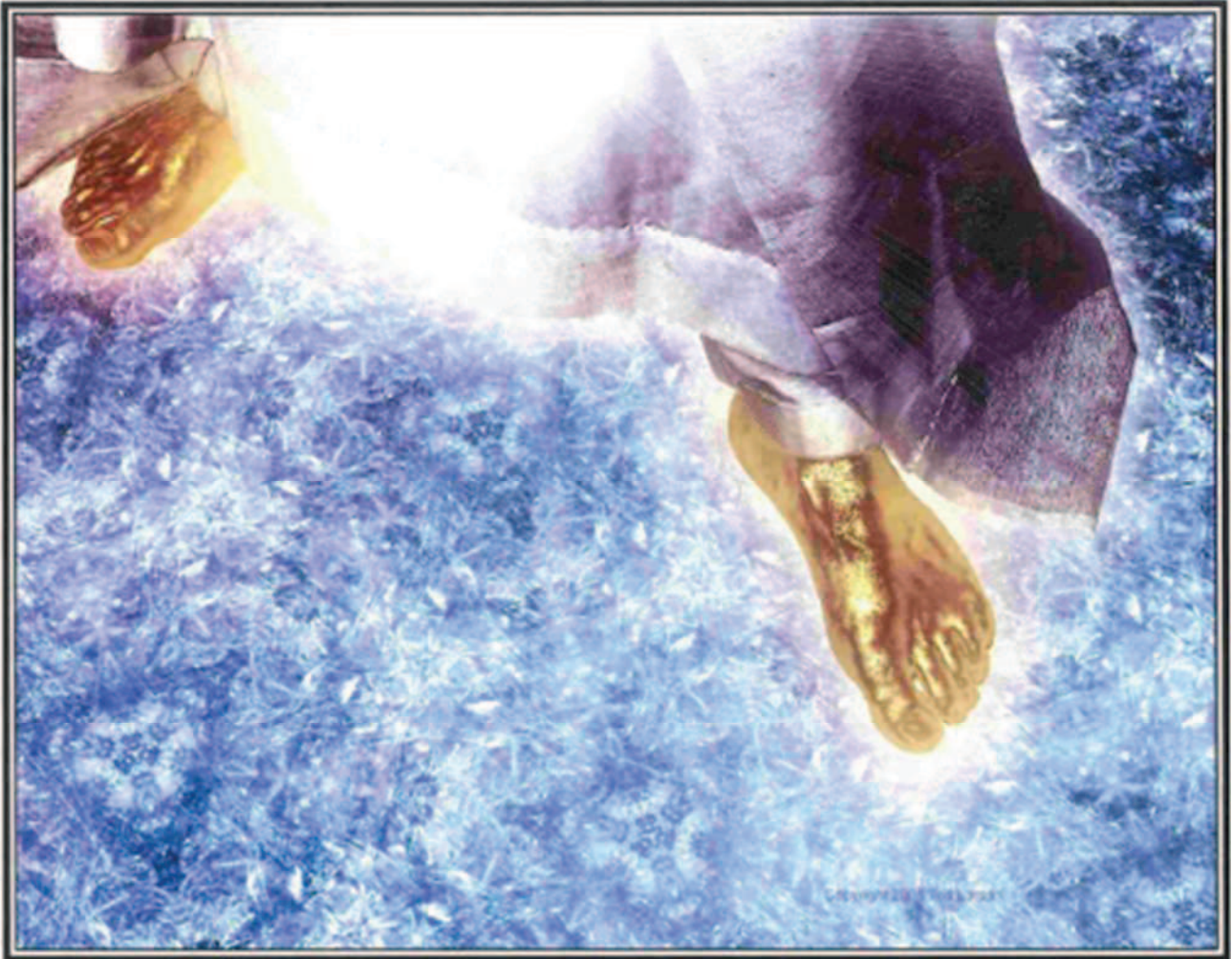
Later on Sinai God declined Moses request to see His face with this explanation: ***“But, He said, ‘you cannot see My face, for no one may see me and live’... ‘Then I will remove My hand and you will see My back, but My face must not be seen.’”*** (Exodus 33:20,23) Gideon, the Judge of Israel, was terrified when he realized that the figure which he had encountered was the Angel of the Lord: ***“When Gideon realized that it was the Angel of the Lord, he exclaimed: ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord, I have seen the Angel of the Lord face to face!’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Peace! Do not be afraid! You are not going to die!’”*** (Judges 6:22 - 23) Nonetheless, there is no basis in the text to understand the words in a manner other than their normal literal sense.

*“The narrative is forthright in its statement of what happened on the mountain. The special group actually saw the God of Israel. Despite attempts by ancient commentators and modern translators to qualify this blunt statement and make it more consistent with the bulk of Old Testament tradition, it must be taken seriously as it stands.”* (Durham, p. 344)

At this most critical moment in the long history of God’s dealings with Israel we have *“a grand exception”* (Currid, p. 139) to the ordinary pattern. That exception serves to further highlight these events as a central moment in the progress of God’s plan of salvation. Verse 11 places particular emphasis on the miracle of that which occurred here as it observes: ***“But God did not raise His hand against these leaders of the Israelites. They saw God.”*** Some have suggested that the figure on Sinai was actually the Angel of the Lord, the preincarnate Christ, as in a number of the parallel texts cited above. While that would certainly have been possible and appropriate, there is no such suggestion in the text itself. The use of the title ***“the God of Israel”*** reinforces the momentous nature of the occasion. The only God, almighty and eternal, has deigned to enter into relationship with this people. He has chosen and blessed them to carry out a unique role in His plan for the salvation of all mankind.



***“Moses and the Elders Behold the Lord”  
18<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving***



*“Under His Feet Was Something Like A Pavement Made of Sapphire” – Larson*

***“Under His feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself.”***

The text is extremely restrained and respectful in describing that which Moses and the elders saw. There is no presumption here that the incomprehensible glory of God may be reduced to the mere words of human language. There is no mention of the appearance of the figure itself, only the luminous surface upon which God stood. This may well be because the men had thrown themselves prostrate on the ground in humility and awe before the Lord and were afraid to gaze upward and look upon Him directly.

*“Thus what Moses and his companions experience is a theophany of the presence of God, not a vision of His person, and what they see, bowed before even that awesome reality is what could be seen from a position of obeisant prostration, the surface on which His presence offered itself.” (Durham, p. 344)*

This reticence to even attempt a description of God is typical of the other theophanies of the Old Testament. Isaiah told of the divine throne, its angels, and the majesty of His royal

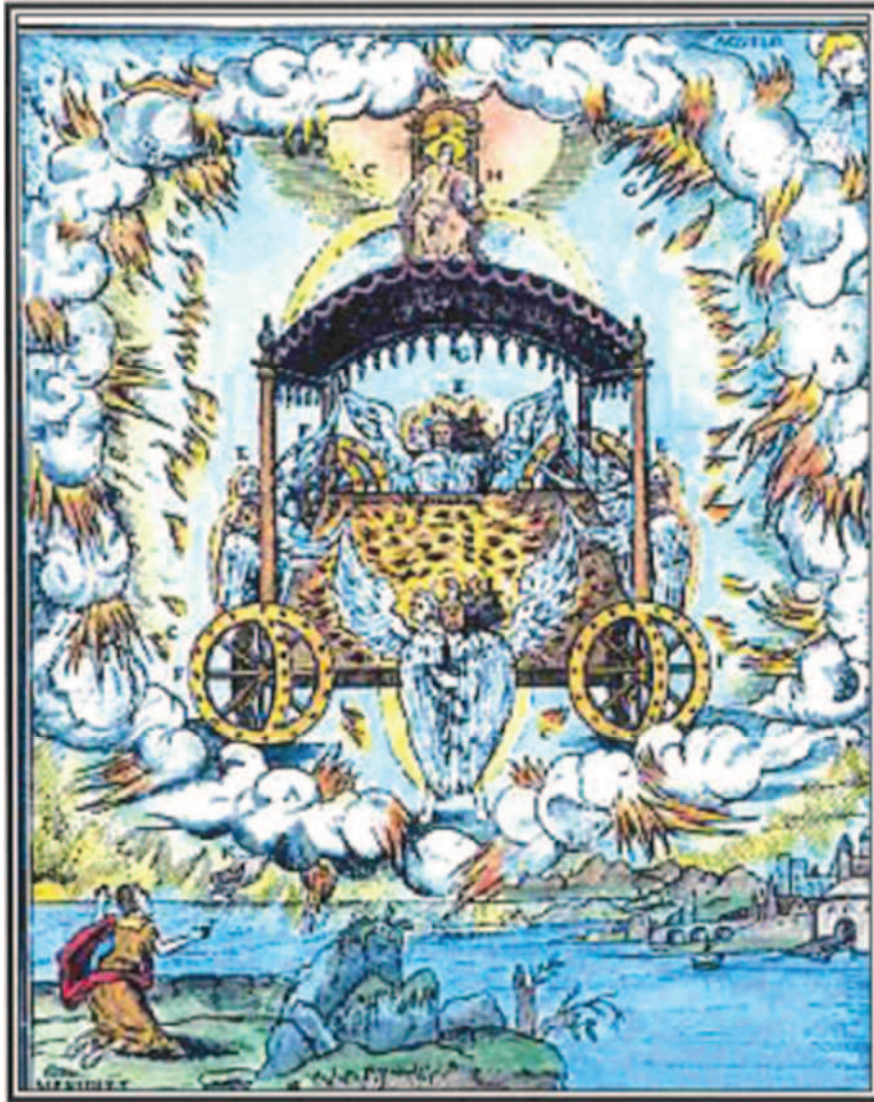
train but offered not a word of description as to the appearance of God Himself:

*“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to each other: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.’ At the sound of their voices, the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.” (Isaiah 6: 1 - 4)*

Even the limited description provided here seems to surpass the limits of human expression. The Hebrew noun which identifies that which was beneath God’s feet refers to paving bricks or stones. What is unique about this pavement is its lustrous color –*“made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself.”* The terminology is intended to convey an image of translucent deep blue, glowing with the sparkling light of a brilliant gemstone. Ezekiel used similar language and the same colors to describe his magnificent vision of God’s glorious throne in much greater detail: *“Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse sparkling like ice, and awesome. Under the expanse their wings were stretched out one toward the other, and each had two wings covering its body. When the creatures moved, I heard the sound of their wings like the roar of rushing waters, like the voice of the Almighty, like the tumult of an army. When they stood still, they lowered their wings. Then there came a voice from above the expanse as they stood with lowered wings. Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be His waist up He looked like glowing metal as if full of fire, and from there down He looked like fire, and brilliant light surrounded Him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around Him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell face down, and I heard the voice of One speaking.” (Ezekiel 1:22 - 28)\*



*“Isaiah’s Vision of God Upon His Throne”  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving*



*“Ezekiel’s Vision of the Lord Upon His Throne”  
18<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration*

In each of these instances the prophet is compelled to resort to a series of inadequate similes, comparing that which he has seen to things of this world. The word *“lik”* recurs over and over again. For the wondrous reality before him transcends the things of this world. The God Who revealed Himself on Sinai is literally *“transcendent,”* that is, beyond or above and every natural category and concept.

***“But God did not raise His hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God and they ate and drank.”*** - The sacred meal of the peace offerings signified the relationship which the divine King had established between Himself and the nation. By the blood of the sacrifices which He had commanded the atonement price for sin had been paid and Israel had become the *“holy people”* of the Lord, commissioned and empowered by Him to carry out the unique role entrusted to them in the plan of salvation. This ritual meal was the sign of the covenant which had been set forth and ratified. The prophet Isaiah later alluded to this covenant feast as an image of the salvation which God would accomplish for His people of every nation:



***“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine - the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations, He will swallow up death forever.”*** (Isaiah 25:6 - 8; cf. Psalm 23:5)

The same imagery appears in Revelation’s depiction of the marriage feast of the Lamb: ***“Then the angel said to me, ‘Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb!’”*** (Revelation 19:9)

Note that the text does not suggest that God participated in this meal. This is not an agreement between equals, but a covenant between a Master and His servants (This is a “*suzerainty covenant*” not a “*parity covenant*”) The representatives of Israel ***“ate and drank”*** before Him.

*“To eat before someone is to acknowledge his authority and beneficence, and conversely one’s own dependence and vulnerability...Subservient to God’s Law and dependent upon His protective power at Sinai-Horeb Israel’s leader’s are feted as loyal vassals.”* (Propp, p. 297)

The condescension of God in agreeing to this covenant is further indicated by the fact that ***“God did not raise His hand against these leaders of the Israelites.”*** The Hebrew phrase *“did not send forth His arm”* means that God did not use the power that was His to do harm to or destroy these men although it was within His ability to do so. The indication is that He could have but that He chose not to.

### ***Verse 12***

***Then the Lord said to Moses, “Come up to Me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.”***

***“Then the Lord said to Moses ...”*** - It is evident, given the instructions that follow, that at the conclusion of the banquet before the Lord, Moses, the priests and the elders came down from the mountain and returned to the encampment. The time span between their return and God's command that Moses re-ascend the mountain alone is not provided. The unique role of Moses as the mediator of the covenant between God and the people of Israel is emphasized by his summons to the summit of the mountain to personally receive the inscribed tablets of the law. In this sense, Moses imperfectly prefigures Christ who will be the Mediator of the new covenant. (cf. Hebrews 9:15 - 22) The Lord indicated in His command that this would be an extended sojourn, not a brief or momentary visit – ***“and stay here.”*** Eventually, Moses’ time on the mountain would be cut short by God Himself because of the upheaval in the camp connected to the apostasy with the golden calf (32:7). The specific purpose of Moses’ return to the mountain is specified as the reception of the

stone tablets upon which God Himself would inscribe the Law – *“And I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.”* The Lord, as the author of the covenant will provide the official copy of the agreement. Deuteronomy 4:13 indicates that God presented Moses with *“two tablets of stone.”* It is most probable that these two tablets were duplicate copies of the same material, one for each party to the covenant. *“It was normal procedure in establishing suzerainty covenants to prepare duplicate copies of the treaty text.”* (Currid, II, p. 141) The text inscribed upon the stone tablets was limited to the Ten Commandments, the core principles of the covenant agreement – *“These are the commandments the Lord proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness; and He added nothing more. Then He wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.”* (Deuteronomy 5:22) Exodus 32:15 describes the tablets in detail: *“Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets.”* It is further specified that the tablets were *“inscribed by the finger of God.”* (31:18)



*“Moses and Aaron With the Tablets of the Law”*

### *Verses 13-14*

*Then Moses set out with Joshua, his aide, and Moses went up the mountain of God. He said to the elders: "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them."*

*"Then Moses set out with Joshua, his aide, and Moses went up the mountain of God." - The name "Joshua" means "Jahweh is my Help." He was a prince of the tribe of Ephraim (Numbers 13:8,16). Joshua had appeared previously as the commander of the Israelites in the battle with Amalek (17:8 - 16) He is mentioned four times in Scripture as Moses' assistant or minister. "Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide, Joshua the son of Nun did not leave the tent." (33:11); "Joshua son of Nun who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, 'Moses, my lord, stop them!'" (Numbers 11:28) "At the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses' aide, 'Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan ... As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you or forsake you.'" (Joshua 1:1,5) It would seem that*

*Joshua went up with Moses to the point at which the prophet awaited the coming of the Lord in the cloud and fire. He remained there while Moses went up into the fiery cloud which enveloped the mountain's crest.*

*"He said to the elders: 'Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.'" - The elders were to remain in the camp to maintain order among the people. Aaron and Hur - according to Hebrew tradition the husband of Miriam - were to take Moses' place as the arbiters of disputes and administrators of justice. These provisions indicate that Moses anticipated a lengthy sojourn upon the mountain.*

### *Verses 15-17*

*When Moses went up on the mountain the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain.*



*"The Steps of Moses to the Peak of Sinai"  
By David Roberts*



*“Moses Leaving the Elders to Ascend Mount Sinai”*

***“When Moses went up on the mountain the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai.”*** - On the previous occasion the presence of God upon the mountain had been signaled by cloud, fire and smoke:

***“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast ... Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the Lord descended upon it with fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder.”***  
(Exodus 19:16 - 19)

Now, once again, the presence of God ***“on the mountain”*** is indicated by the fact that ***“the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai.”*** The cloud and the glory recall the Pillar of Cloud and Fire which had heretofore been the visible manifestation of God’ presence which had led the Children of Israel through the wilderness and the sea.

***“The cloud that concealed the mountain, from the midst of which Yahweh called out to Moses, and into the midst of which Moses went, is a special symbol in Exodus of divine guidance, divine communication, and divine Presence. The settling glory of Yahweh is similarly a symbol of divine presence”*** (Durham, p. 346)

The Hebrew verb “*sha-ken*” “**settled**” which describes the presence of God’s glory upon Sinai is the root from which the term “*Shekinah*” will be derived. This concept of God dwelling in the midst of His people will be crucially significant in the impending construction of the tabernacle and later the temple as the dwelling place of God in the midst of His people.

*“The verb translated “dwelt” is the Hebrew “sha-ken.” Its use anticipates the next chapter, which describes the commands for the building of the ‘mishkan,’ that is, the tabernacle, or dwelling place of God. At Sinai, Yahweh was separated from His people, but He directed them to build a tabernacle, so that He might with them in their very midst. This is a major theme of the Book of Exodus; God dwelling with His people!” (Currid, II, p. 143)*

**“For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud.”** - The seven days appear to recall the pattern of the seven days of creation. The Lord’s intent is to impress upon Israel their new creation as His own people. As the prophet Isaiah would later declare: **“I am the Lord, your Holy One, Israel’s Creator, your King.”** (Isaiah 43:15)

*“The theophanic cloud – God’s Holy Spirit glory presence - covers the mountain for six days, just as the Spirit of God moved in creation for six days. On the seventh day Yahweh calls to Moses. The six day period and the seventh day calling of Moses were meant to communicate symbolically to Israel the reality of the new creation which Yahweh was accomplishing by the Exodus events and the Mosaic covenant. The new creation was liberating Israel....Yahweh’s six day session upon Mount Sinai symbolizes His work of new creation - a redeemed Israel in covenantal relationship with Himself” (Niehaus, pp. 198-199)*

The six days of waiting also provide Moses with the opportunity to prepare himself spiritually for his encounter with the Lord upon the summit. It is significant that Moses does not presume to come before the Lord at his own initiative. He respectfully awaits God’s invitation at the perimeter of the glory cloud. At the same time, God’s call of Moses on the seventh day suggests that the Lord has chosen him to lead His people into the Sabbath rest.

**“To the Israelites, the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain.”** -The manifestations of God’s presence upon the mountain were clearly evident to the encampment below. In Chapter 19 the Israelites had been terrified by God presence and had pleaded with Moses to represent them before the Lord. That perspective of fearful

awe is repeated here, as the appearance of God's presence upon the mountain is described from Israel's perspective. "***A consuming fire***" is that which destroys or kills. When Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu disobeyed the Lord to offer unauthorized worship in the Tabernacle the consequences were fatal – "***So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.***" (Leviticus 10:2) The same language describes the fate of those who followed Korah in his rebellion: "***The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them along with Korah, whose followers died when fire devoured the 250 men.***" (Numbers 26:10) But Moses was not consumed by the fire which Israel nervously observed from the base of the mountain. God intended that Israel observe the wonder of His presence in order that they might recognize the Lord's call of Moses to be His spokesman with the people and acknowledge the message which Moses conveyed as the Word of God Himself. "*The sight of this glory was visible to the sons of Israel on the plain below the mountain, in a special authentication of all that Yahweh was saying and giving in that special place, at that special time, to, and so through, His special intermediary, Moses*" (Durham, p. 346)

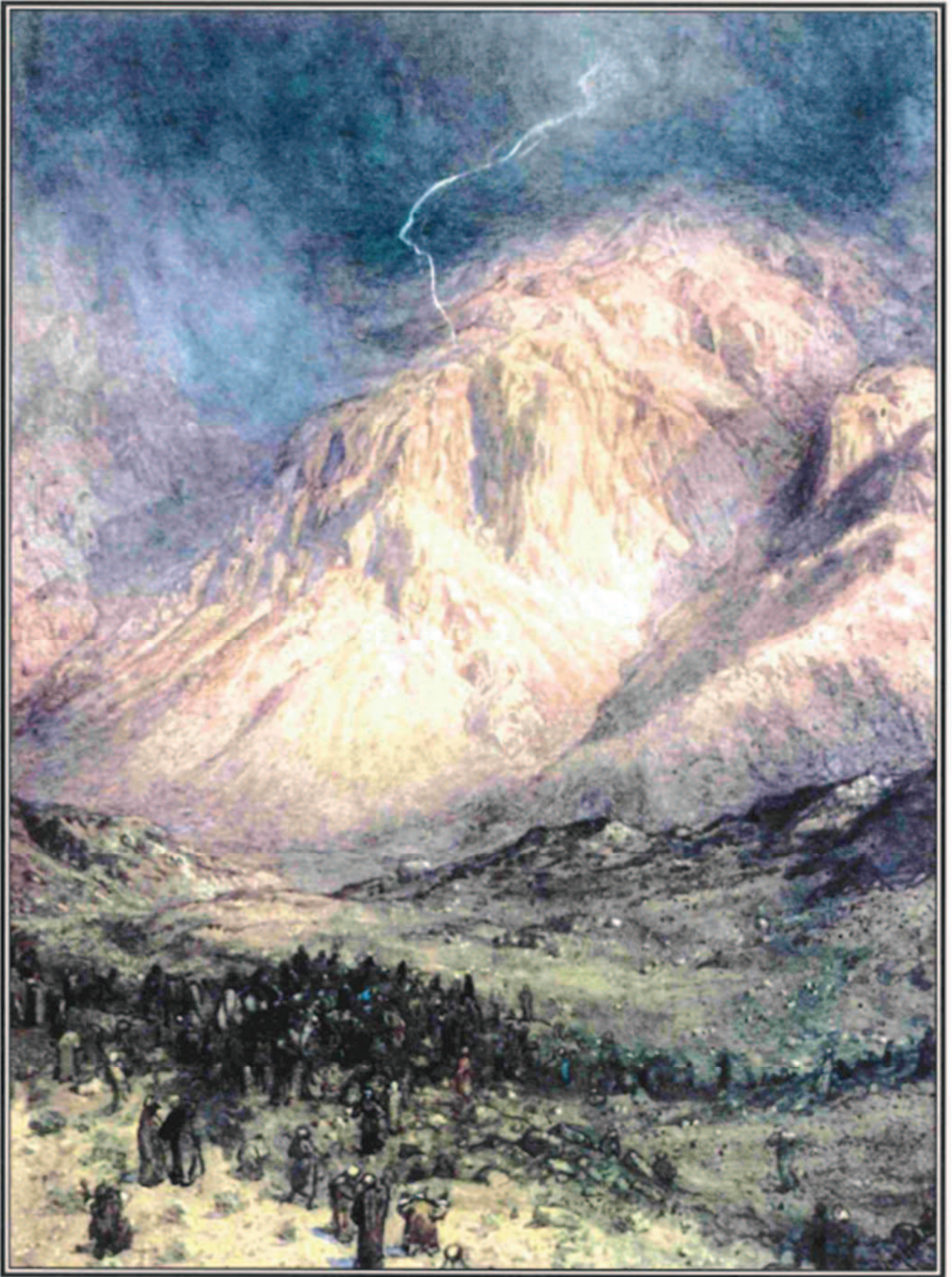
### ***Verse 18***

***Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.***

***"Then Moses entered the cloud ..."*** - The segment concludes with this simple summary statement. "*The stately march of the narrative throughout this passage corresponds with the unparalleled grandeur of the occasion.*" (Murphy, p. 282) The forty days of his time with the Lord is a number frequently reflected elsewhere in Holy Writ:

*"The number forty was certainly significant since it was not only repeated on the occasion of his second protracted stay upon Mt. Sinai (Deut. ix, 18), but occurred again in the duration of Elijah's journey to Horeb, the Mount of God in the strength of the food received from the angel (1 Kings ix, 8), and in the fasting of Jesus at the time of His temptation (Matt. Iv, 2), and even appears to have been significant in the forty years of Israel's wandering in the desert (Deu. Vii, 2). In all these cases, the number refers to a period of temptation, of the trial of faith, as well as to a period of the strengthening of faith through the miraculous support bestowed by God."* (Keil/Delitsch, p. 501)

Deuteronomy also informs us that the prophet fasted throughout this period, miraculously sustained and strengthened by God (cf. Deuteronomy 9:9). Hebrew myth and legend have produced innumerable tales of Moses' transport to heaven through myriad ranks of angels and his adventures among them as he struggled to cope with the jealousy which his unique access to God had provoked within the heavenly hosts. Such fanciful nonsense only serves to distract from the majestic simplicity of the Biblical account.



*"The Glory of the Lord Upon Mount Sinai" by Sir William Hole*



*“The Tabernacle In The Wilderness” by Larson*

## ***Exodus Chapter 25***

***(1) The Lord said to Moses, (2) “Tell the Israelites to bring Me an offering. You are to receive the offering for Me from each man whose heart prompts him to give. (3) These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; (4) blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen; goat hair; (5) ram skins dyed red and the hides of sea cows; acacia wood, (6) olive wood for the light; spice for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; (7) and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod, the breast-piece. (8) Then have them make a sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them. (9) Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. (10) Have them make a chest of acacia wood - two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. (11) Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it. (12) Cast four gold rings/or it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other;. (13) Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. (14) Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the chest to carry it. (15) The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark; they are not to be removed. (16) Then put in the ark the Testimony which I will give you. (17) Make an atonement cover of pure gold - two and half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. (18) And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. (19) Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of***



*one piece with the cover at the two ends. (20) The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover. (21) Place the cover on top of the ark and place the Testimony, which I will give you. (22) There, above the cover, between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites. (23) Make a table of acacia wood - two cubits long, a cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. (25) Also make a rim around it a hand breath wide and put a gold molding on the rim. (26) Make four gold rings for the table and fasten them to the four corners where the table legs are. (27) The rings are to be close to the rim to hold the poles used in carrying the table. (28) Make the poles of acacia wood, overlay them with gold and carry the table with them. (29) And make its plates and dishes of pure gold as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings. (30) Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before Me at all times. (31) Make a lampstand of pure gold and hammer it out, base and shaft; its flower-like cups, buds and blossoms shall be of one piece with it. (32) Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand- three on one side and three on the other. (33) Three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on one branch, three on the next branch, and the same on all six branches extending from the lampstand. (34) And on the lampstand there are to be four cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms. (35) One bud shall be under the first pair of branches extending from the lampstand, a second bud under the second pair, and a third bud under the third pair - six branches in all. (36) The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lampstand, hammered out of pure gold. (37) Then make its seven lamps and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it. (38) Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold. (39) A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all these accessories. (40) See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.*

## **Verses 1-2**

*“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell the Israelites to bring Me an offering. You are to receive the offerings for Me from each man whose heart prompts.’”*

*“The Lord said to Moses ...”* - The core of the covenant which God had concluded with Israel was their selection as a people who were to play a unique role in the plan of salvation enabled by God’s presence among them in a unique way. The Tabernacle, and subsequently the Temple, with their attendant rituals, ceremonies, and sacrifices would exemplify and prefigure the sacrifice of God's Son. The shedding of His innocent blood upon the cross would enable forgiven sinners to stand in the presence of God once again. The Tabernacle, (with the Shekinah resting above the ark, would be the visible expression of the reality of God’s presence among His chosen people. In that context it was most appropriate that



*“Moses Receiving the Offerings for the Tabernacle” by T. Sarg*

God’s revelation to Moses on Sinai began with the design of the Tent of Meeting and its furnishings. The New Testament reveals the perfect fulfillment of this concept in the Person of the God/Man, Jesus Christ. In the Prologue to his Gospel, John used the language of the Tabernacle and the Shekinah to explain the significance of the incarnation of Jesus: *“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling (literally – “tabernacle”) among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, Who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14) The triumphant climax of Revelation uses the same tabernacle language as it promises the ultimate fulfillment of God’s dwelling among His people in the heavenly Jerusalem: *“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people and God Himself will be with them and be their God.’* (Revelation 21:3)

*“Tell the Israelites to bring Me an offering.”* - While God could have simply created the Tabernacle Himself, He chose to give Israel the privilege of providing the gifts to build the dwelling place of God in the midst of His people. The Hebrew word for *“offering”* in this phrase means *“that which is raised up.”* The idea expressed in this word is that the giver sets something aside for sacred use. That is, he lifts up his gift toward heaven and dedicates it to the Lord. All of *“the Israelites”* - without distinction or exclusion of any kind – are given the opportunity to participate in this offering. *“The sanctuary is to serve the entire community, and its construction is therefore to be accomplished through the generosity of all.”* (Sarna, p. 156) The only stipulation is that the gifts are to be given *“from each man whose heart prompts.”* No one was required or coerced to give. This was to be a genuine free will offering – *“each one whose heart makes him willing.”* This pattern distinguishes the Tabernacle from the Temple which Solomon funded by special taxes levied upon the people. Moses, as God’s representative is to receive the offerings from the people – *“You are to receive the offerings for Me.”* These were not gifts to a building or a church project, but each one a gift to God Himself – *“for Me.”* The giving itself would constitute an act of worship as each voluntary contributor expressed his own gratitude and love for God and His abundant blessings. Subsequent texts will describe the overwhelming response of the people and their joyful eagerness to give thanks and praise to their God.

### ***Verses 3-7***

***These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood, olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breast piece.***

***“These are the offerings you are to receive from them...”*** - The Lord provided Moses with an overview of the materials that would be used in the construction/fabrication of the of the tabernacle. More specific and detailed materials lists will be described in the actual accounts of construction in Chapters 25 - 30. An exhaustive listing is provided in 35:4 - 29. Here the items are simply grouped in broad general categories; metals, fabrics, skins and wood, the oils and incenses components, and finally the precious gemstones to be used in the breastplate of the High Priest.

It is evident that the materials which God specified were the very best available. Many of them were extremely costly. At various points throughout the history of the church the viewpoint has been advanced that churches should not waste money on beautiful works of art or build elaborate churches. Rather, all of our resources should be allocated for works of charity to help the poor, feed the hungry, etc. That is clearly not the perspective here. God’s design for the tabernacle and subsequently the temple demonstrates that the manner in which we build the places of worship where the Lord has promised to dwell among us should be an assertion of His glory. At the same time, they should inspire a sense of awe among the people and serve as an affirmation of the wonder which occurs within them as the Almighty deigns to enter our lives through the means of grace which He has ordained and established. The materials cited here are typically associated with royalty and the palaces of great kings. Their use in the construction of the tabernacle acknowledges God as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. *“The materials themselves represent a catalog of opulence; the finest metals; the finest leathers, the finest fabrics, the finest wood, the finest oil and incense, and semi-precious stones.”* (Durham, 354) This is not a matter of extravagance or excess. Our efforts must take place within the context of the economic status of the people. The Lord deserves the very best that we are capable of giving Him. The most humble church which reflects the self-sacrificing devotion of its people is more God-pleasing than the most magnificent cathedral built to exalt its builders. However, the fact remains that the manner in which we build our churches can be an expression of our priorities. Thus, the Lord condemned the Israelites for their failure to rebuild the temple after their return to Jerusalem:

***“Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin? Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: • Give careful thought to your ways... You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it... Go up into the mountains and bring down timber, and build the house so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored, says the Lord.”***  
(Haggai 1 :3-8)



The finest materials and the most outstanding human artistic expression are most appropriately used *“ad maiorem dei gloriam”* (“to the greater glory of God”). Works of charity are, of course, also an absolutely essential part of the ministry of the church. But this is not a matter of choosing between two mutually exclusive alternatives, as has often been suggested. Both are valid and necessary ways of serving God.

The listing begins with the metals which will be used to gild the various components of the buildings and walls and the fashioning of the furnishings and instruments of the worship services. **“Gold,”** as the most precious of metals, is accorded the place of prominence at the head of the list. The other categories will follow the same pattern of listing the most valuable commodities first. Gold was of particular significance for use in the tabernacle not only because of its beauty and value but because of its permanence. Classic Rab bi Ibn Ezra explained: *“The basic principle is that the objects closest to Yahweh's holy presence are made of gold whose luster never tarnishes”* (Goldingay, II, p. 373) **“Silver”** does tarnish over time but the blackening superimposed on the gleaming white of the metal was often considered to enhance its appearance. **“Bronze”** is an alloy of copper and tin, used widely throughout the ancient world because of its malleability which facilitated its use in the decorative arts.

The second category includes the materials to be utilized in weaving the fabrics which would make up the coverings and drapes of the tabernacle along with the vestments of the

priests. Once again, value determines the priority of the listing. Rabbinic tradition indicates that the yarns of the tabernacle were wool, from the sheep and goats of the vast flocks historically maintained by the Israelites since their days in Canaan. The cost of these yarns came from the exotic dyes which were used to color them. The ***“blue and purple”*** at the head of the list came from the island of Cyprus by way of Phoenician traders. In describing the fabulous wealth of the trading cities of Tyre and Sidon, the prophet Ezekiel declared: ***“Fine embroidered linen from Egypt was your sail and served as your banner; your awnings were of blue and purple from the coasts of Phoenicia.”*** (Ezekiel 27:7) The purple of Tyre was an expensive status symbol throughout antiquity, associated with only the most wealthy and powerful. So, for example, Lamentations 3:5 – ***“Those who once ate delicacies are destitute in the streets. Those nurtured in purple now lie on ash heaps.”*** Hence the more recent association of purple cloth with royalty, the proverbial imperial purple of emperors and kings. The blue and purple dyes were taken from the crushed shells of sea snails: *“Purple was expensive because it was laborious to extract; it may have taken as many as 12,000 snails to produce 1.4 grams of dye. In Roman times, a pound of purple silk cost the equivalent of \$100,000 in the 1980’s”* (Goldingay, II, p. 373) ***“Scarlet yarn”*** was colored with a dye obtained from the larva of a tiny scale insect, *“coccida,”* a parasitic that was found on oak trees. Because of its source, this brilliant hue was frequently called *“worm red.”* The Hebrew text adds the adjective *“sani”* which means *“to shine”* or *“to flash.”* The Greek Septuagint translates the color here as *“double crimson,”* reflecting the ancient practice of dipping the wool into the dye vat twice to deepen and enrich the color. Isaiah alluded to the unique brightness of this dye in God’s gracious promise to Israel: ***“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”*** (Isaiah 1:18)

***“Fine linen”*** is a cloth of the highest quality made from thread which had been spun from fibers of flax straw. The very best linen was produced in Egypt to provide the cloth worn by Pharaoh and the members of his royal court. Pharaoh dressed Joseph in fine linen when he exalted him to the position of Prime Minister (cf. Genesis 41:42). Egyptian linen was of the purest white. Excellent examples of this delicate, tightly woven cloth have been uncovered in the tombs of Egyptian kings. The material is so smooth, soft, and delicate that it is often indistinguishable from silk. It was light and cool which would make it particularly popular in the extreme heat of the Middle Eastern deserts.

***“Goat hair”*** is the tough thick hair of the long-haired goats raised among the desert tribes. The Talmud uses a Hebrew phrase in reference to this hair which literally means *“goat’s feathers.”* To this day, it remains highly prized in weaving the rugged cloth used in the tents of the Bedouin tribesmen of the Middle East. Cloth made from goat hair is black in color to offer protection from the sun. It is also water repellent and tough enough to resist the constant onslaught of the sand driven by the fierce desert winds. This would have been the least expensive of the fabrics included on the list.

**“Ram skins dyed red”** refers to hides which were specially tanned or dyed to achieve a deep red color.

**“The hides of sea cow”** has bewildered translators and Bible scholars across the centuries. There is only one use of this term in Scripture outside of texts that refer to its use in the tabernacle, namely Ezekiel 16:10 where it describes leather from which sandals are fashioned. Suggested interpretations have ranged from the exotic to the bizarre:

*“In rabbinic times the ‘tachash’ was invested with mythical association and identified with the unicorn. Because of the similarity with the Arabic ‘tuhas,’ which denote both the dolphin and the dugong (sea cow) found in the Red Sea, modern scholars have variously identified the biblical creature with one or the other.”* (Sarna, p. 157)

Luther and the KJV translated the word as badger. Others have argued for the more regal ermine. Some insist that the reference is not to a mammal at all but to the tough hide of a crocodile. The more ancient rabbis tended to associate the word with a color rather than a creature. Advocates of this view argue that the Arabic identification of a variety of aquatic mammals - porpoises, manatees, seals and narwhales - with a form of this word is the result of the single characteristic they all share in common, their coloration.

*“With very few exceptions, they have a similar coloring: a dusky grey blue, grey-indigo, ranging from near black (a kind of midnight navy) to deep slate blue to pale bluish grey, a dusky sky - blue color, any one of which is more pronouncedly blue in tone and beautiful when viewed under a clear sky and in the waters of the sea. The effect of this natural camouflage evoked this description of ‘tekhelet’ in the Mishnah: ‘The sages say that ‘tekhelet’ resembles the sea, which resembles the sky, which resembles the sapphire stone, which, in turn, resembles the color of God’s seat of glory.’”* (“Tachash, Wik., p. 10)

While an absolute conclusion is not possible, given the absence of Biblical parallel or conclusive linguistic evidence, this would appear to be the most plausible conclusion. In addition to the scarlet ram skins other hides dyed to the deep blue of the sky and the sea, which is often associated with the dwelling place of God - most recently in the Sinai theophany of the preceding chapter - were used in the construction of the tabernacle.

**“Acacia wood”** is a durable hardwood highly resistant to insect attack and dry rot. There are hundreds of different types of acacia trees throughout the region south of what would become the land of Israel. *“They yield very hard, durable, but lightweight planks.”* (Sarna, p. 158) *“It would have been one of the few local sources of sufficiently large pieces of timber and yields a hard, close-grained, orange colored wood, suitable for woodworking.”*

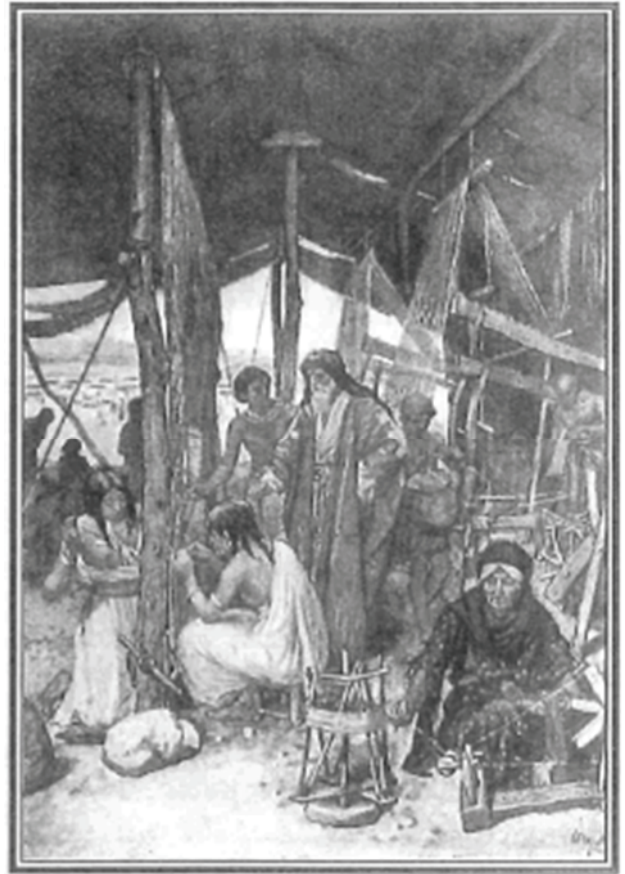
(Mackay, p. 439) This type of lumber would have been ideal for use in a structure that was to be regularly dismantled and moved.

***“Olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense”***

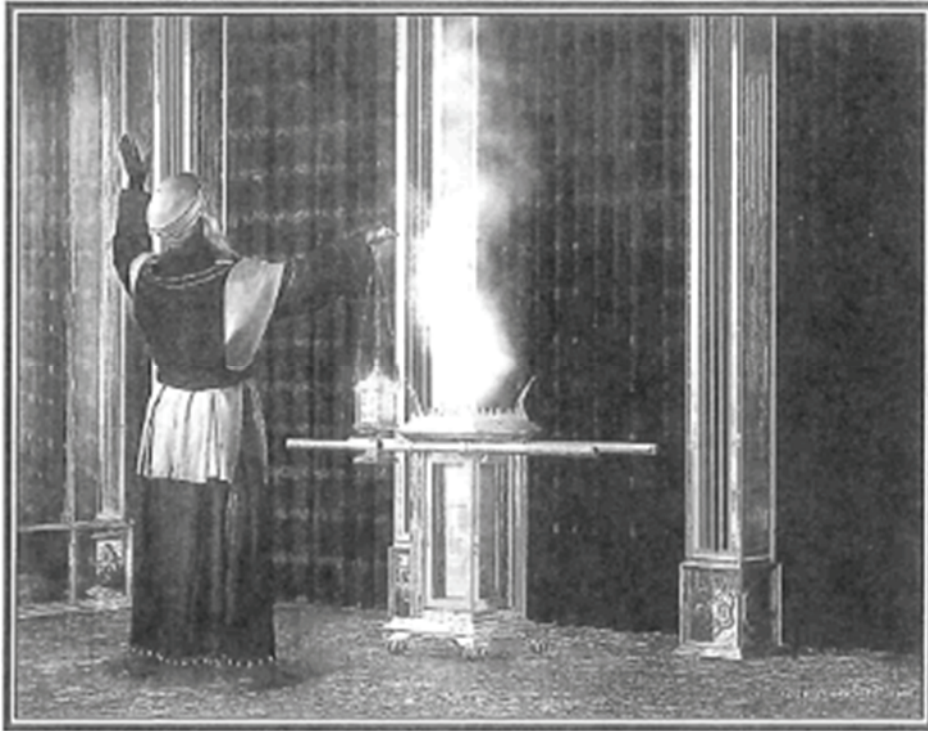
The olive oil to be used in the lamps of the sanctuary had to be specially prepared for sacred use. Only the purest, clear oil was permitted so that it would burn in the golden lamp stand throughout day and night with little or no smoke. The finest unripe olives were carefully selected and then mashed by hand in a mortar. The pulpy mass was then placed in a cloth basket through which the clear oil was pressed.

The ***“anointing oil”*** was to be used in the consecration of the tabernacle, its furnishings, and its personnel (40:9 - 15). This ritual would symbolize the fact that these things and these people had been set apart by God to serve Him in a unique way. The Hebrew word used in this phrase is the base from which the title ***“maschiah,”*** the Messiah would be derived. This title designated the Savior whom God would set apart as the Deliverer who would come to accomplish the divine plan of salvation. The Greek equivalent of this title in the New Testament is ***“christus.”*** The Gospel of John alludes to this parallel between the tabernacle and the Christ as the dwelling place of God on earth. ***“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling (literally – “tabernacle”) among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*** (John 1:14) The ***“spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense”*** are specified in Chapter 30:

***“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take the following fine spices; 500 shekels of liquid myrrh; half as much, that is, 250 shekels of fragrant cinnamon; 250 shekels of fragrant cane; 500 shekels of cassia - all according to the sanctuary shekel and a hin of olive oil. Make them into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer’...Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take fragrant spices, gum resin, onycha and galbanum - and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer.’”*** (Exodus 30:22 - 25; 34 - 35)



***“Moses Inspecting the Weaving and Embroidering for Hanging of the Tabernacles” by Sir William Hole***



*Aaron Before the Incense Alter in the Tabernacle” by Larson*

The sources of the spices for the anointing oil are as follows: liquid myrrh is the sap of the balsam tree; cinnamon the powdered bark of the cinnamon tree; fragrant cane is the pith of the root of a particular reed and cassia is drawn from the flowers of the cinnamon tree. The incense spices are somewhat more exotic. Gum resin is a powder removed from the center of hardened drops of myrrh. It is extremely rare and valuable. Onycha is made from the crushed shells of mollusks. Galbanum is a resin derived from the roots of desert flower which grows in Syria and Persia. The combination of these spices in the oil, as it was applied in anointing or burned in the lamp stands would have been highly aromatic. All of these components were necessary to complete the work of preparing the tabernacle as the dwelling place of God in the midst of His people.

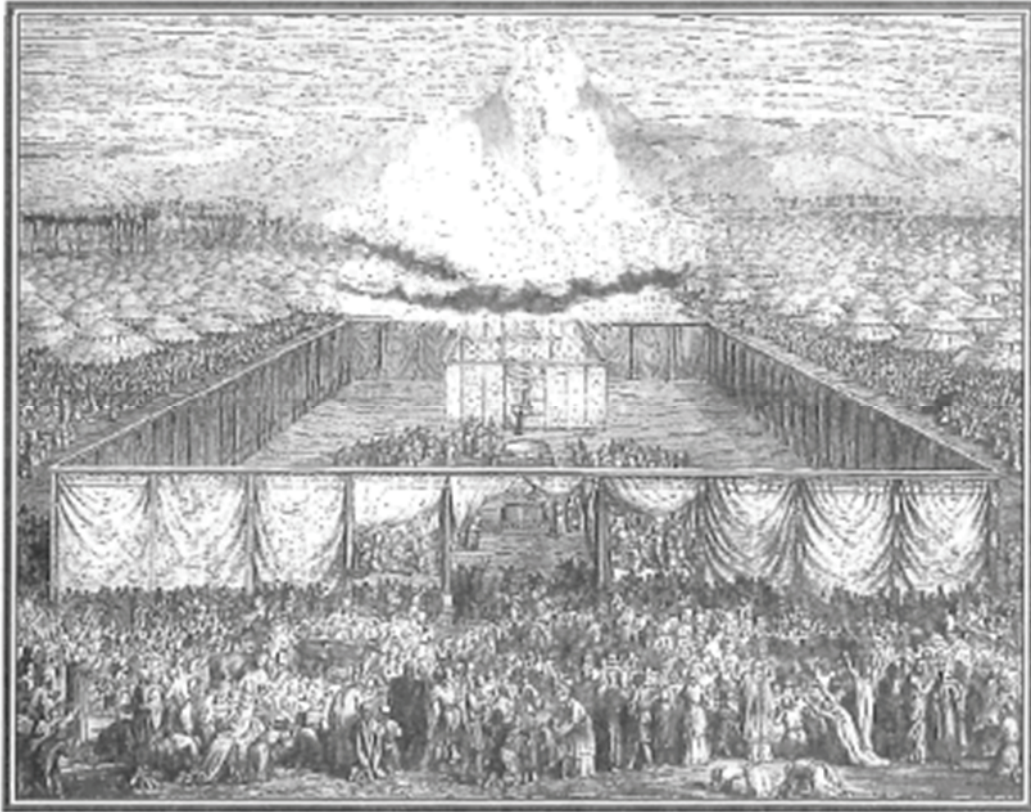
*“And onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and the breast piece”* – The final category in the introductory list of materials are the gems for the vestments of the High Priest. Only the *“onyx stones”* are specifically mentioned here. The rest are included in the general category of *“other gems.”* Their specific colors, placement and functions in the symbolism of the priestly vestments will be presented in Chapter 28.

### ***Verses 8-9***

***Then I will have them make a sanctuary for Me and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.***

*“Then I will have them make a sanctuary for Me...”* -This summary statement defines the purpose for all of the instructions given heretofore. The structure which Israel will build





*“The Tabernacle In the Midst of the Camp”  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Luther Bible Engraving*

will become a *“sanctuary for Me.”* The Hebrew noun *“mikdash”* defines a place that is set apart and recognized as a sacred place, a place set apart for the Lord. The same term – *“beit ha-mikdash”* will later be used to describe the temple in Jerusalem. Any place in which the Lord chooses to appear is by nature a holy place (cf. Joshua 24:26; Exodus 15:17; Amos 7:9; Ezekiel 11:16) The English noun *“sanctuary”* reflects this concept in its derivation from *“sanctus”*-holy, that is, set apart. God's establishment of the tabernacle as His visible dwelling place in the middle of the camp, and later the nation, defined the nature of the covenant which He had now established:

*“These were not just places where people gathered for worship. What made them holy was that the Lord Himself made His presence known there in a perceptible manner. He was not going to be an absent monarch, but one who presenced Himself among His people with whom He came to dwell.” (Mackay, p. 439)*

This verse constitutes a significant statement of one of the basic themes of Exodus, namely the determination of God to dwell in the midst of the nation of Israel, thereby setting this nation apart from all others upon earth. The Creator God is omnipresent, but Israel would receive the unique blessing of a physical structure which would manifest the Lord's covenant with them and a divinely prescribed system of worship which would instruct and inform them as to the manner in which He would accomplish His plan for the salvation of

humanity. *“This verse is the simplest and also perhaps the strongest statement in Exodus a book often described as specially reflecting the theme of the presence of God- of God’s - concern to center Himself among His people and to have them organize themselves around Him.”* (Stuart, p. 565) Only in this light can the profound significance of the tabernacle/temple and its worship be properly recognized.

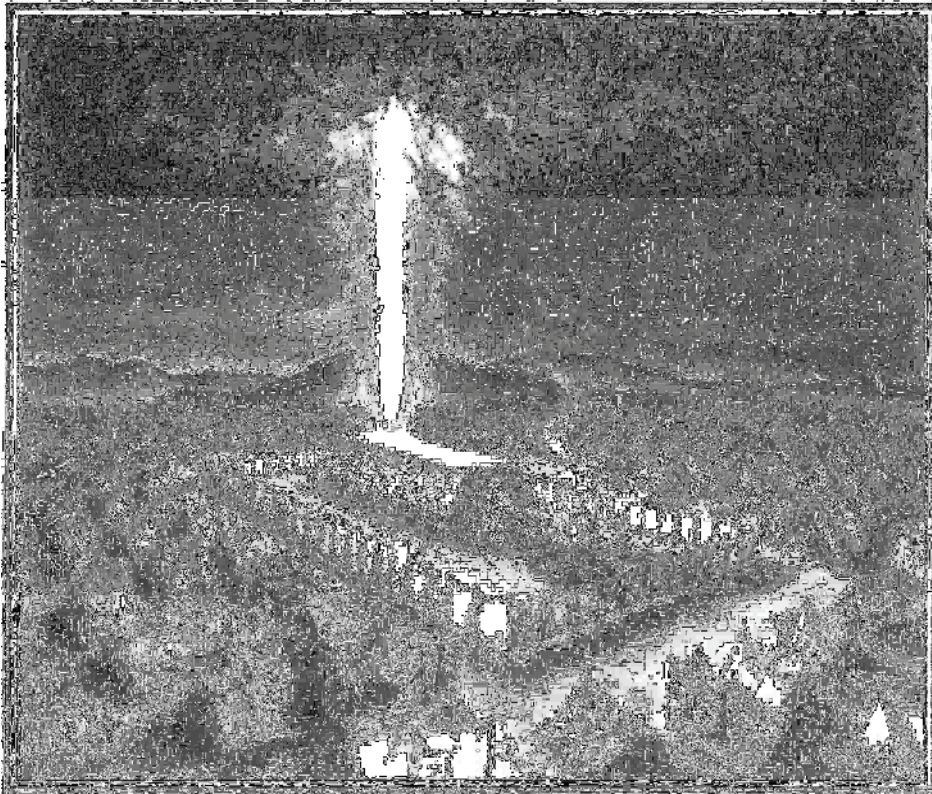
From this perspective it can also be readily understood why the establishment of the tabernacle takes place immediately after the theophany which accompanied the establishment of the covenant at Sinai. The divine presence manifested upon the mountain would be perpetuated by the divine presence within the tabernacle in the midst of the encampment so that the people would have the constant assurance that God was truly among them according to His promise.

*“In order to understand the significance and the purpose of the Tabernacle, we must realize that the Children of Israel, after they had been privileged to witness the revelation of God on Mount Sinai, were about to journey from there and thus draw away from the site of the theophany. So long as they were encamped in that place, they were conscious of God’s nearness; but once they set out on their journey, it seemed to them as though the link had been broken, unless there were in their midst a tangible symbol of God’s presence among them. It was the function of the Tabernacle to serve as such a symbol...The nexus between Israel and the Tabernacle is a perpetual extension of the bond that was forged at Sinai between the people and their God. The Children of Israel, dwelling in tribal order at every encampment, were able to see, from every side, the Tabernacle standing in the midst of the camp, and the visible presence of the sanctuary proves to them that just as the glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai, so He dwells in their midst wherever they wander in the wilderness.”* (Cassutto, p. 319)

**“And I will dwell among them”** - The Hebrew verb *“shakan”* is not the ordinary term for habitation. This verb literally means *“to pitch a tent.”* The rabbis would use a variation of the same term to designate the Divine presence in the glory cloud as the *‘shekinah.’* It is critically important to recall the fundamental purpose of the tabernacle/temple. This unique structure was not required by God. Instead it was designed to be a blessing for Israel. *“God has no need of a tabernacle in which to dwell; it is only Israel that requires a divine tabernacle, and when they look at this sanctuary which they have erected in their camp, they will become conscious of My presence.”* (Cassutto, p. 327) Dr. Sarna warns against confusing this sanctuary with its superstitious counterparts throughout the pagan world. The tabernacle is not being build in an attempt to confine or control the Lord. It is being built at His command by His design for the benefit of His chosen people:

*“Thus, the sanctuary is not meant to be understood literally as god’s abode,*

*as are other such institutions in the pagan world. Rather, it functions to make perceptible and tangible the conception of God's immanence, that is, of the indwelling of the divine presence in the camp of Israel, to which the people may orient their hearts and minds.*" (Sarna, p. 158)

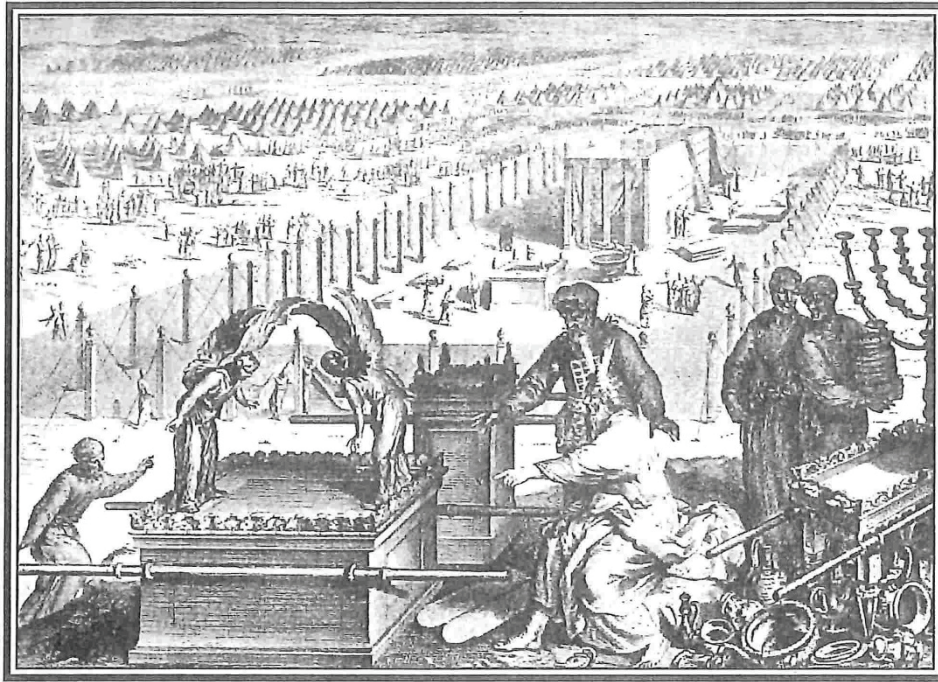


*"The Tabernacle In The Midst of the Encampment"*

King Solomon humbly acknowledged the same truth in his prayer at the dedication of the first temple in Jerusalem: ***"But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple that I have built!"*** (1 Kings 8:27) Only the gracious promise of God made these structures the sanctuaries that they were. Again, Solomon's prayer affirmed that the temple became God's dwelling place only because of His promise that it would be so.

***"Yet, give attention to Your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, O Lord my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that Your servant is praying in Your presence this day. May Your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which You said, 'My name shall be ther' so that You will hear the prayer Your servant prays toward this place."*** (1 Kings 8:28-29)

***"Make this tabernacle and all of its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you."*** The manner in which God would dwell among His people and the manner in which the people were to worship Him was to be determined by God Himself. None of this was to be determined by human imagination or inclination. Everything that was built and everything



*“The Erection of the Tabernacle” – 18<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving*

that took place within the tabernacle must be in accord with the divine command. The text is most emphatic in this regard. God informed Moses that he would be shown the **“pattern.”** This term indicates a model or blueprint. This divine abode was not to be merely a copy of pagan temples devised by man. It would be conceived within the mind of God, **“a copy and shadow of what is in heaven,”** as the author of Hebrews described it: **“They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the Tabernacle; See to it that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”** (Hebrews 8:5) The rabbis traditionally understood the word **“pattern”** to indicate that Moses was given a vision of - or a visit to - the literal tabernacle/temple which had existed from eternity in heaven. There are many within orthodox Judaism today who anticipate that at the beginning of the messianic kingdom on earth, this heavenly temple will come down to earth to enable the resumption of the sacrifices and rituals. This phrase is most probably not a reference to a literal heavenly counterpart of the temple/tabernacle. **“What is in heaven,”** to borrow the language of Hebrews once again, is not a material building with altars and sacrificial offerings **“What is in heaven”** is the truth of God and of His plan of salvation to be fulfilled in the person of His Son, the promised Messiah. This concept is clearly evident in Hebrew’s subsequent description of the superiority of the ministry of Christ to that of the High Priests of the Old Testament. The inspired author continued to utilize the design of the Tabernacle and to speak of that design as the reflection of the heavenly truths which it embodied all of which were perfectly fulfilled in Christ:

*“Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary... When Christ came as the high priest of the good things that are already here, He went through the greater and more permanent tabernacle*

*that is not man made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption...It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.”* (Hebrews 9:1, 11 - 12 , 23-24)

Keil/Delitsch notes that the abundance of precise detail provided for the tabernacle and its furnishings reinforces the impression of profound significance in its design. He summarizes the sense of the text:

*“The thoughts of God concerning salvation and His kingdom which the earthly building was to embody and display were set forth visibly in the pattern shown to Moses. The symbolical and typical significance of the whole building necessarily follow from this...What these divine thoughts were that were embodied in the tabernacle, can only be gathered from the arrangement and the purpose of the whole building and its separate parts; and upon this point the description furnishes so much information, that when read in the light of the whole of the covenant revelation, it gives to all the leading points precisely the clearness which we require.”* (Keil/Delitsch, I, p. 506)

### **Verses 10-11**

***Have them make a chest of acacia wood—two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it.***

***“Have them make a chest of acacia wood”*** - Having completed the general introduction to the construction of the tabernacle, the Lord proceeded to describe in greater detail the sacred furnishings which would be placed within the sanctuary and its courts. Most appropriately, that listing begins with the most crucial object of the tabernacle, the holy ark of the covenant. This sequence reveals the critical significance of the Ark of the Covenant: *“Although it might seem more systematic to begin with a description of the design of the tabernacle*



***“The High Priest Before the Ark on the Day of Atonement”***

*itself, and then to address the particular furnishings that fit within it, the importance of the Ark as the item that would symbolize God's presence among His people, far outweighs such considerations, and its design, therefore, was described first, even before that of the tabernacle that would house it. " (Stuart, p. 567)*

The Ark would be the physical symbol of God's presence in the midst of Israel. The Glory Cloud would tower above it so that all the people could see the manifestation of God's presence. The golden chest would contain the tablets of the commandments which were the formal statement of the covenant which God had established at Sinai. The Hebrew word which appears here, "*aron*" simply refers to a chest or a box. After the loss of the Ark at the time of the Babylonian destruction of the first Temple, this same term "*aron kodesh*" was used in reference to the cabinet in which the scrolls of the Torah were kept within the synagogues.

The dimensions of the Ark are given in "*cubits*." The word literally means "*forearm*." A cubit was the distance between the tip of a man's middle finger and his elbow. The standard cubit of the Old Testament was eighteen inches long. If that is the case, the ark as presently described was forty-five inches long, twenty-seven inches wide, and twenty-seven inches high. The acacia wood chest was to be overlaid with gold both inside and out. The text specifies that the gold to be used must be of the highest quality – "*pure gold*." It had to have been carefully refined, far beyond the routine procedures, to remove every impurity. "*Pure gold, the most valuable metal available, was employed in those parts of the tabernacle that were closest to the special presence of the Lord.*" (Mackay, p. 442) Rabbinic tradition indicates that:

*"According to some rabbinic authorities, a nest of three separate chests of slightly varying dimensions was constructed; one was of wood and two were of gold. The main wooden chest, referred to in Verse 10, was inserted inside on gold one, which became its jacket; the other gold chest was fitted inside the wooden chest as its lining. Another tradition simply has the wooden chest simply inlaid with gold inside and out."* (Sarna, p. 159)

Either method would have been familiar to Hebrew artisans trained to build the treasure cities and tombs of the pharaohs. King Tutankhamen's body was found resting within three coffins, the innermost of solid gold, and the two outer ones of hammered gold over wooden frames.

**"And make a gold molding around it."** - The size and nature of this golden molding is not specifically indicated. The Hebrew word refers to a crown or a wreath. Although the text does not designate the location of this molding, the meaning of the word would suggest - although not require - that the molding would be at the top of the chest, thereby serving to distinguish the chest itself from the lid which was to be placed upon it. Such an ornate rim around the top of the chest would have suggested a crown "*encircling it like an ornamental*

wreath.” (Keil/Delitsch, II, p. 506) Others contend for aesthetic reasons that the moulding would have been positioned on the side or at the base of the chest. An absolute conclusion is not possible from the wording of the text. What is clear, however, is that while the size of the ark was not particularly impressive, its wondrous appearance would most certainly have indicated its unique role in the design of the tabernacle.



*“The Levites Carrying the Ark Before the Walls of Jericho” by Tissot*

### ***Verses 12-15***

***Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the chest to carry it. The poles are to remain in the rings on the sides of this ark. They are not to be removed.***

***“Cast four gold rings for it ...”*** - The sanctity of the ark was such that it was not to be profaned by contact with the hands of men. The sad fate of Uzzah the son of Abinadab who reached out to steady the ark as it was being transported to Jerusalem by King David illustrates the profound gravity of this concept.

*“When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the Ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. The Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark. Then David was angry because the Lord’s wrath had broken out against Uzzah.” (2 Samuel 6:6-8)*

The parallel text in 1 Chronicles is still more explicit: *“The Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah and struck him down because he had put his hand upon the ark. So he died there before God.”* (1 Chronicles 13:10) Although his intentions were pure, the cart driver had violated the sanctity of the ark and paid the ultimate penalty. *“Uzzah was therefore a type of all those who with good intentions, humanly speaking, yet with unsanctified minds, interfere in the affairs of the kingdom of God, from the notion that they are in danger, and with the hope of saving them.”* David’s angry reaction was most probably provoked, to a large extent, by his own sense of personal responsibility for the death of this man. It was the king who had arranged for the transportation of the ark in this inappropriate manner. Whatever the reason may have been, the sacred ark was not to be hauled around on a cart like so much baggage. Numbers Chapter 4 had specified that when the ark was to be moved, it was first to be carefully covered by the High Priest and his aides and then carried by Levites from the family of the Kohathites. The ark was only to be transported in reverent



*“Uzzah Struck Down Before the Ark” by Tissot*

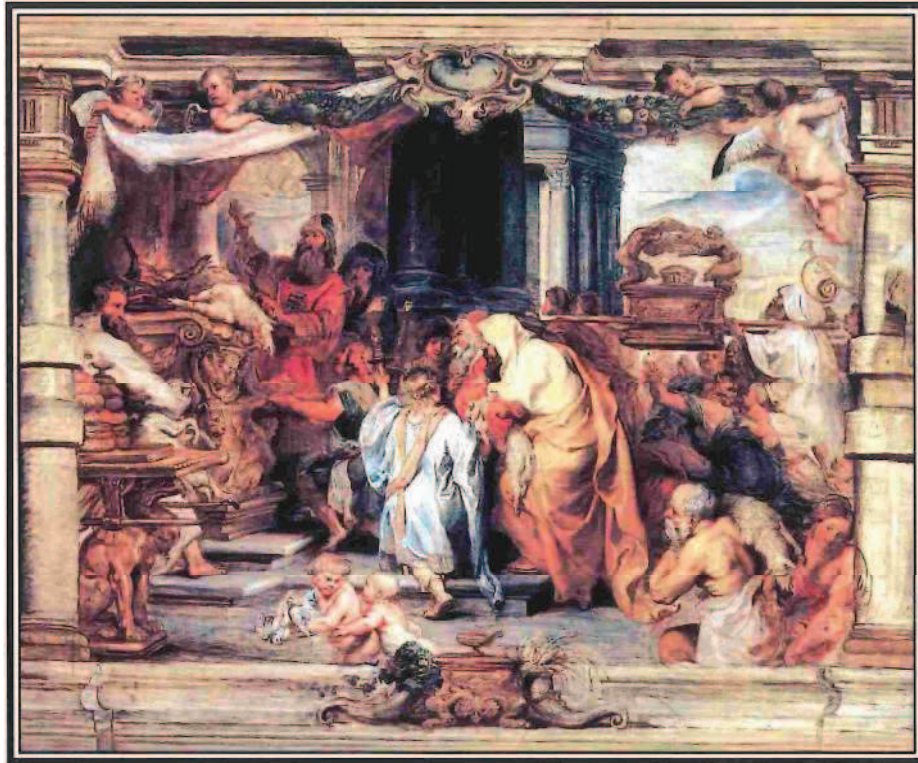




*“The Plague of Ashdod” by Poussin*

procession by those priest who had been authorized to do so. These instructions were accompanied by stern warnings regarding the priests themselves: ***“But they must not touch the holy things or they will die. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the Tent of Meeting ... But the Kohathites are not to go in to look at the holy things even for a moment or they will die.”*** (Numbers 4:15,20) When God commanded Joshua to have the ark carried into the Jordan River before the people, the same profound sense of caution was evident. The people were instructed to maintain ***“a thousand yards”*** between themselves and the ark as the crossed the parted waters of the river: ***“When you see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God and the priests who are Levites carrying it, you are to move out from your positions and follow it ... But keep a distance of about a thousand yards between you and the ark. Do not go near it.”*** (Joshua 3:4,6) When the ark was returned to Israel by the Philistines after the devastation of their cities, seventy men of the village of Beth Shemesh were killed because they dared to profane the ark: ***“But God struck down the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the Lord ... And the men of Beth Shemesh asked, ‘Who can stand in the presence of the lord, this holy God?’”*** (1 Samuel 6:19 - 20) In this context, what might otherwise have seemed to be excessive punishment for a trivial offense becomes more understandable. In the aftermath of the episode, David abandoned his rash plan to move the ark and wisely awaited further instruction from the Lord.

***“And fasten them to its four feet with two rings on one side and two rings on the other.”***  
The golden rings were to be permanently mounted on the ark to prevent the need for any



*“The Sacrifice of the Old Covenant” -A Tapestry by Peter Paul Rubens*

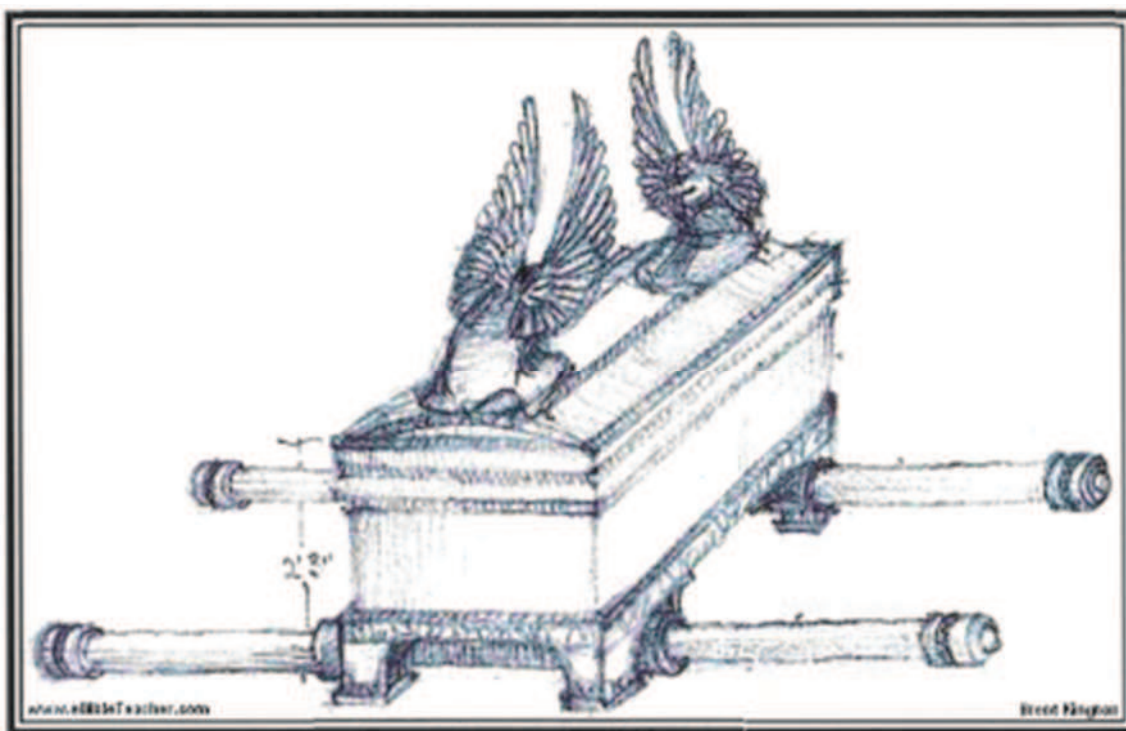
human contact with the chest itself. The text instructs that the rings be mounted on each of the **“four feet”** of the ark. While the Hebrew noun used here – *“pa’amot”* literally refers to a human foot extended for walking, its usage in this phrase has been the subject of debate. Traditional rabbinic commentary understood the term in this instance to simply mean *“corner”* because of the absence of any mention of extensions at the base in the preceding description of the chest. The rabbis then proceeded to argue about whether the poles were mounted on the upper or lower corners. Most interpreters today agree that the word ought to be understood in its ordinary sense. The feet of the ark are introduced here because of their relevance to the rings for the carrying poles which were to be attached to them. If there were feet protruding from each of the ark’s lower corners they would have served to raise the holy ark above the profane surface of the earth and, on a more practical level, prevent it from potentially being scratched or damaged. At the same time, mounting the rings on these four feet would also have removed the need to attach them to the ark itself, thereby separating the poles and those who carried them one more layer away from the sacred chest, further insuring its sanctity. The text does not elaborate as to the style or appearance of the feet upon which the ark rested. Given the exquisite beauty of every other detail of its construction, the design of the ark’s feet no doubt further expressed the glory and majesty of God.

Nor does the text specify whether the carrying poles ran along the short or long sides of the ark. Since the ark was relatively small, either position could easily have served the necessary function. Umberto Cassuto convincingly argues that given the placement of the cherubim upon the lid of the ark, a frontal orientation would have to be on the long side.

Therefore, the poles would have been mounted on the shorter sides to enable the angel's outstretched wings to be appropriately displayed as the cherubim faced one another.

*“The rings shall be so arranged that the two rings shall be on the one side of it-0 on one of the shorter sides of the ark - and the two rings on the other side of it. The rings were made for the purpose of inserting in them the long poles that were placed on the shoulders of those who carried the ark, whenever it was necessary to move it from one place to another...When the ark was being carried, one of its longer sides was in front, and the two cherubs on the kapporeth were being borne forward, one next to the other, and thus the ark was place in the Most Holy Place- the two cherubim alongside each other, one on the right and the other on the left.” (Cassutto, pp. 329 - 330)*

This suggestion is further reinforced by the fact that the carrying poles of the ark protruded from the Holy of Holies into the Holy Place in Solomon’s temple which would have been the case if the poles were on the short sides and the ark was placed with the front facing the curtain dividing the sanctuary: **“These poles were so long that their ends, extending from the ark, could be seen from the inner sanctuary, but not from outside of the Holy Place; and they are still there today.”** (2 Chronicles 5:9) Nonetheless, in the absence of textual detail it is not possible to conclusively determine the placement of the carrying poles.



*Sketch of the Ark Based On Exodus 25 by Brent Kingston*

**“The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark; they are not to be removed.”** – The carrying poles were to be carved out of acacia wood and covered with hammered gold. They were to permanently remain in place within the golden rings mounted on the feet of

the ark. In this way, the need to remove and replace them, which could have involved inadvertent contact with the ark itself was eliminated. The sketch above depicts the rings mounted on the inside of the ark's four feet, which would both have strengthened their placement and facilitated the task of carrying the ark.

***“Then put in the ark the Testimony which I will give you.”*** - Upon completion of the ark ***“the Testimony which I will give you”*** was to be placed within it. The Hebrew term means *“to bear witness”* or *“to offer testimony in court.”* In this instance, the word serves as an effective description of the covenant which God had established with Israel at Sinai by which the special relationship between God and this nation had come into being. The specific reference is to the two tablets of stone upon which the Ten Commandments would be inscribed: ***“Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, both front and back”*** (24:12) These stone tablets became the physical affirmation of the reality of God's commitment to His people. Nahum Sarna observes that this practice was not unusual among the cultures of the Near East:

*“The sole function of the Ark is to house the tablets of stone. According to the testimony of 1 Kings 8:9, in the Salamonie Temple ‘there was nothing inside the Ark but the two tablets of stone which Moses placed there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after their departure from the land of Egypt.’ The practice of depositing legal documents in a sacred place was quite widespread in the ancient Near East. It symbolically underscored the importance of the document and projected the idea that the presiding deity witnessed and guarded it and oversaw its implementation.”* (Sarna, p. 160)



***“King David Before the Ark” by Giovanni Pittoni***

The fundamental significance of the presence of *“the Testimony”* within the ark is indicated by the fact that one of the most common designations of the ark from henceforth will be *“the Ark of the Testimony”* (i.e. 25:22; 26:33 - 34) or simply *“the Testimony”* (16:34; 27:21; 30:36; Numbers 17:19,25). The entire tabernacle is similarly labeled as *“the tabernacle of the Testimony”* (38:21; 10:11) or *“the Tent of the Testimony”* (Numbers 9:15; 17:22 - 23; 18:2; 2 Chronicles 24:6). Similarly, the veil which divided the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies is also designated as *“the curtain of the Testimony.”* (Numbers 24:3)

### ***Verses 17-20***

***Make an atonement cover of pure gold - two and a half cubits long, and a cubit and a half wide. And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover.***

***“Make an atonement cover of pure gold ...”*** - The ornate lid of the ark, a solid slab of the purest gold, is described in unique detail, befitting its profound symbolism and crucial role it was to play in the worship life of Israel. The distinct identity of the ***“atonement cover”*** is emphasized by the fact that in a number of instances the ark and its cover are listed as separate items within the tabernacle inventories (31:7; 39:12; 39:3) The Hebrew term used for the cover of the ark is *“kapporeth.”* Etymologically, the word goes back to a root which means *“to cover over.”* It came to describe atonement, that is, the action of restoring harmony or accomplishing reconciliation between two parties who had been in conflict with or hostile to one another. This action reverses that division and replaces it with friendship and harmony. The link between the concepts of covering over and atonement would be beautifully expressed in the ritual of the Day of Atonement. The High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies, stand before the ark, and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice upon the Atonement Cover, thereby restoring the harmony between God and His people as their sins were covered over before Him by the blood of the sacrifice:



***The High Priest Before the Ark on the Day***

***“He is to take a censor full of burning coals from the alter before the Lord and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. He is to put the incense on the fire before the Lord, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the Atonement Cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. He is to take some of the bull’s blood, and with his finger sprinkle it upon the Atonement Cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the Atonement Cover. He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain. He shall sprinkle it on the Atonement Cover and in front of it. In this way, he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and the rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been.”*** (Leviticus 16:12 - 16)

Hebrews explains that the ritual of the Day of Atonement prefigured and was perfectly fulfilled in the once for all sacrifice of Christ whose blood paid the eternal atonement price for the sins of the world.



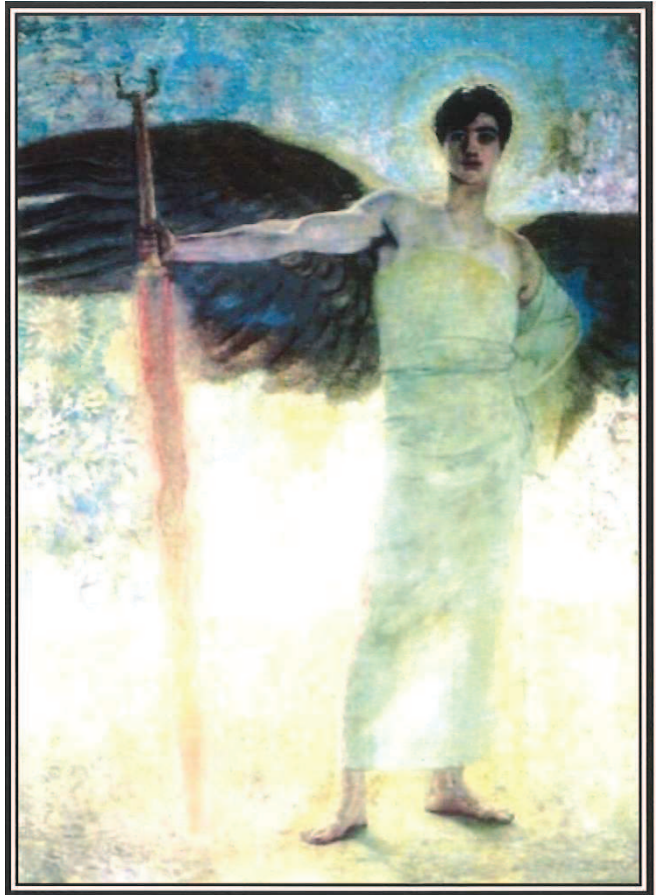
***“The High Priest Sprinkling the Blood Upon the Atonement Cover of the Ark on Yom Kippur”***

***“Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place which had the golden altar of incense and the gold covered Ark of the Covenant. The ark contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the ark were the cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the atonement cover ... But only the High Priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year and never without blood which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing ... When Christ came as the high priest of the good things that are already here, He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves, but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by means of His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.”*** (Hebrews 9:3 - 5;7 – 8; 11 – 12)

The dimensions of the Atonement cover match those of the Ark itself. The cover was designed to fit precisely over the chest. However, unlike the Ark which was acacia wood covered with hammered gold, the Atonement cover was a solid slab of the finest gold, another indication of the particular importance of this component.

***“And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover.”***—

The Atonement Cover was to be adorned with the figures of two golden angels. The angels are identified as ***“cherubim.”*** Along with the ***“seraphim”*** (Isaiah 6:1-8), cherubim are the most exalted of angels and are associated with the immediate presence of the Lord and His heavenly throne. The etymology of the Hebrew word ***“kerub”*** is uncertain. The most plausible suggestion is a derivation from the Akkadian term ***“karabu”*** which means ***“blessing.”*** This would reflect the role of the cherubim in the endless song of blessing and praise which surrounds the throne of God. Cherubim are mentioned frequently in the Bible. There are eighty-seven references to cherubim in the Old Testament. They are also mentioned in Hebrews 9:5 in reference to the Ark of the Covenant. The ***“four living creatures”*** which surround the throne of God in Revelation are also most probably cherubim, although the specific title does not appear in John’s visions (Revelation 5:6 - 14; 6:1 - 8; 7:1 - 11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4). The first cherubim mentioned in Scripture are the angels armed with fiery swords whom God appointed as the guardians of Paradise to bar fallen mankind from the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:24) God is frequently described as ***“the Lord who is enthroned between the cherubim”*** (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 37:16). King David celebrated God’s intervention on his behalf using the image of God riding upon the cherubim: ***“He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under His feet. He mounted the cherubim and flew; He soared on the wings of the wind”*** (2 Samuel 22:10 - 11; cf. Psalm 18:10) The most elaborate descriptions of God’s throne and the cherubim which surround are provided in the visions of Ezekiel:



***“The Guardian of Paradise” by Franz von Stuck***

of Ezekiel:

***“I looked and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north - an immense storm with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal and in the fire was what looked like***



*“Ezekiel’s Vision of the Lord Enthroned Above the Cherubim” by William Blake*

*four living creatures. In appearance their form was like that of a man, but each of them had four faces and four wings. Their legs were straight; their feet were like those of a calf and gleamed like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had the hands of a man. All four of them had faces and wings and their wings touched one another. Each went straight ahead, they did not turn as they moved. Their faces looked like this: each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox, each also had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. Their wings were spread upward; each had two wings, one touching the wing of another living creature on either side, and two wings covering its body. Each one went straight ahead, without turning as they went. The appearance of the living creatures was like that of burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures. It was bright and lightning flashed out of it. The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning.” (Ezekiel 1:4-14)*

Ezekiel’s dirge over the impending downfall of the heathen king of Tyre alludes to the fall of the king’s real master, the devil, and indicates that Satan himself was once a guardian cherub upon the mountain of God:

*“You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the Garden of God, every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold, on the day you were created, they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God, you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you ... So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub from among the fiery stones.” (Ezekiel 28:12 - 16)*





*“Lucifer in His Original Glory As a Guardian Cherub”  
by William Blake*

The presence of the cherubim became the major theme of the ornamentation of Solomon’s temple. Two large golden cherubim stood over the ark within the Holy of Holies and figures of the cherubim were carved into the doors of the Holy of Holies and the walls of the Holy Place. These angelic images became the way to signal the presence of God in this place without presuming to depict God Himself and thereby run the risk of the image becoming the object of idolatrous worship.

*“In the inner sanctuary he made a pair of cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high. One wing of the first cherub was five cubits long, the other wing was five cubits - ten cubits from wing tip to wing tip. The second cherub also measured ten cubits, for the two cherubim were identical in size and shape. The height of each cherub was ten cubits. He placed the cherubim inside the innermost room of the temple, with their wings spread out. The wing of one cherub touched one wall, while the wing of the other touched the other wall, and their wings touched each other in the middle of the room. He overlaid the cherubim with gold. On the walls all around the temple, in both the inner and the outer rooms, he carved cherubim, palm trees and open*

*flowers. He also covered the floors of both the inner and outer rooms of the temple with gold. For the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood, with five - sided jambs. And on the two olive wood doors he carved cherubim, palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid the cherubim and the palm trees with beaten gold. In the same way, he made four sided jambs of olive wood for the entrance to the main hall. He also made pine doors, each having two leaves that turned in sockets. He carved cherubim, palm trees and open flowers on them, and overlaid them with gold hammered evenly over the carvings." (1 Kings 6:23 - 38)*

In the second temple, the olive wood doors to the Holy of Holies would be replaced by the great temple curtain. The cherubim, however, remained - woven into the fabric of the curtain with gold and gemstones.



*“The High Priest Before the Ark in Solomon’s Temple”*

The wings of the cherubim, outstretched toward one another, served to frame the space over the middle of the ark as if to highlight the invisible presence of God within the Holy of Holies. This would be particularly true if the front pair of wings were lower than the wings to the back , as is often the case in artist’s depictions of the ark.

*“The cherubim of the tabernacle certainly communicate some concepts of God that are fundamental to the religion of Israel. As bearers of the celestial throne, they evoke a belief in divine, transcendent sovereignty. Their permanent place above the ark expresses God’s immanence - His enduring*

*presence in the covenanted community of Israel. Their outstretched wings represent the idea of consummate mobility, that is, God's omnipresence.”*  
(Sama, 161)

### **Verses 21-22**

***Place the cover on the top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. There, above the cover, between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all My commands for the Israelites.***

***“Place the cover on the top of the ark ...”*** - Having carefully specified the design of the Atonement Cover, the Lord proceeded to conclude His instructions for the assembly and use of this most remarkable of all the furnishings of the tabernacle. The Atonement Cover was built to fit precisely on the top of the chest, where the weight of the solid gold slab would hold it firmly in place. The Atonement Cover would most probably have fit within the gold molding which formed a cornice around the top of the chest (cf. vs. 11). The ark had already been described as ***“the Ark of the Testimony”*** in Verse 16. The specific instruction here to place the stone tablets upon which the Ten Commandments would be engraved within the chest is deliberately correlated to the installation of the Atonement Cover to highlight the profound significance of God's design. Within the ark rests the Law of God. Righteousness and holiness demands the perfect fulfillment of that Law. But the Atonement Cover is placed over the Law, signifying the gracious love of God which will



***“The Lord Enthroned Between the Cherubim Above the Ark” by John Singer Sargent***

satisfy the demands of the Law for us. The blood of the sacrifices sprinkled upon the Atonement Cover on Yom Kippur points forward to and is fulfilled by the blood of Christ shed for us upon the cross. James Murphy brilliantly summarized the theology of the ark in his classic 19<sup>th</sup> Century commentary on the Book of Exodus:

*“The mercy seat with the attentive, overshadowing cherubs is placed above the ark which contains the testimony. This arrangement is significant of the intercourse of god with fallen man, being founded on the basis of immutable rectitude. Through a propitiation which meets all the demands of the violated law.... Hence we perceive that the ark, mercy seat and cherubim form one piece of emblematic workmanship, symbolizing not God, but the atonement; the holiness of God expressed by the Law, and His mercy indicated by His manifested presence between the cherubim, being mediated or brought into harmony by the propitiation figured by the mercy seat. The great fundamental principle of reconciliation is mooted here, to be afterwards developed and illustrated in other parts of the tabernacle.”* (Murphy, p. 292)



*“Adam and Eve Driven From Paradise” by Gebhardt*

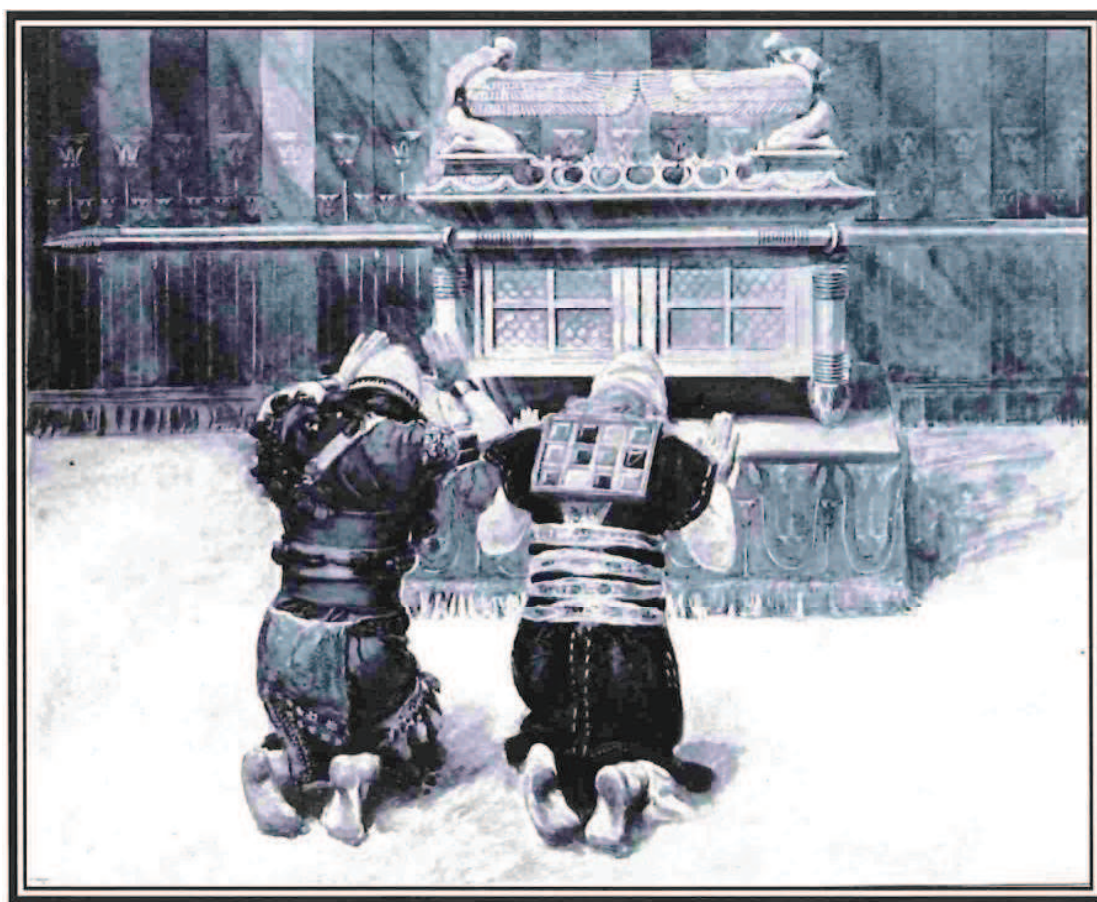
In this context, the selection of the magnificent cherubim as the angels which would adorn the Atonement Cover was not random, but precisely designed to reinforce this theological message of Law and Gospel. The fearsome guardians who had barred the way to the Tree of Life in the aftermath of the fall are now transformed in the gatekeepers of grace. Henry W. Soltau prepared a commentary on the furnishings of the Tabernacle in 1851. In it, he offered this masterful explanation of the transition of the Cherubim:

*“When first seen on the earth, the Cherubim were placed ‘at the east of the garden of Eden to keep the way to the tree of life.’ (Genesis 3:24) They then stood associated with the ‘flaming sword,’ the sword of vengeance and judgement; and as witnesses that all the terrible majesty of God’s power and holiness, which had been insulted, was against man and had closed up every avenue against his return to his original happy state. The word and majesty of God had been trifled with and despised, man had given credit to Satan’s falsehood, and had by his unbelief made God a liar; and the Cherubim then took their stand as the avengers of God’s insulted majesty, and the stern proof that man was an outcast, banished by God from that happy place, and in no way allowed for his return to the tree of life. This significant placement of the Cherubim by itself manifested the hopelessness of any attempt on the part of man to regain life by his own efforts; and that unless the glory of God could be met, and the flaming sword of vengeance and of holiness satisfied, it were vain for man to hope for any way of return to life; but death and the curse were his inalienable portion. But to us the heavens have been opened, and there in the Holiest, on the Mercy Seat, we behold these Cherubim of Glory. The earthly garden with its tree of life is indeed lost and lost forever, but the ‘Paradise of God’ is opened to us; and life above, hidden with Christ in God, is ours through faith in Him. The place of life and of the Cherubim is alike changed. They no longer stand to debar man’s approach to life, but they brood with outstretched wings over the place of mercy, whence life and blessings flow. No longer are they connected with the flaming sword; but their faces now intently turn toward the place of grace. For all the power and the glory of God is held by One in heaven, who uses it for mercy.” (Soltau, pp. 25 - 26)*



*“The Cherub Guardian of Paradise” by Benjamin West*

***“There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony I will meet with you ...”*** - The text carefully reiterates the entire arrangement so that its significance will not be missed, either by Moses or his readers across the generations. Then comes the wondrous promise – ***“There ...I will meet with you and give you all of My commands for the Israelites.”*** In this promise lies the entire point of the Tabernacle and the Ark. God would graciously dwell among His people. He would speak with them through the spokesmen whom He designated and they would know His will. For this reason, the Tabernacle was frequently designated as ***“the Tent of Meeting.”*** (Cf. Exodus 29:42; 30:36) Numbers 7:89 reports the fulfillment of this promise: ***“When Moses entered the Tent of Meeting to speak with the Lord, he heard the voice speaking to him from between the two cherubim above the Atonement Cover on the Ark of the Testimony. And he spoke with Him.”***



*“Moses and Aaron Before the Ark” by James Tissot*

### ***Verses 23-30***

***Make a table of acacia wood - two cubits long, a cubit wide and a cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold and make a gold molding around it. Also make around it a rim a handbreadth wide and put a gold molding on the rim. Make four gold rings to the table and fasten them to the corners where the four legs are. The rings are to be close to the rim to hold the poles used in carrying the table. Make the poles of acacia wood, overlay them with gold and carry the table with them. And make its plates and dishes of pure***

***gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings. Put the Bread of the Presence on the table to be before Me at all times.***

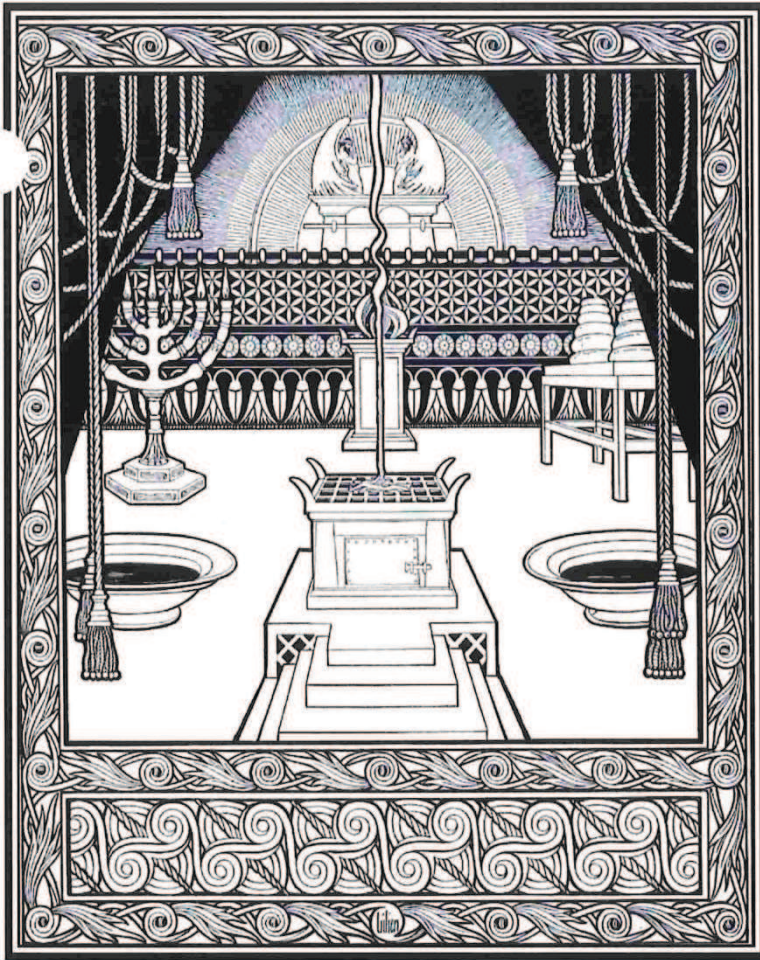
***“Make a table of acacia wood ...”*** - The description of furnishings now moves from the Holy of Holies to the Holy Place. The first is a golden table to hold the twelve loaves of the Bread of the Presence. This table is variously identified as ***“the Table of the Presence”*** (Numbers 4:7); ***“the table for the setting out of the consecrated bread with all its articles”*** (2 Chronicles 29:18); ***“the Table of Pure Gold”*** (Leviticus 24:6); ***“the ceremonially clean table”*** (2 Chronicles 13:11), and, ***“the golden table on which was the bread of the presence.”*** (1 Kings 7:48). The table was smaller than the ark but of similar design, also equipped with golden rings and carrying poles to facilitate its transportation. The Table of the Presence is depicted on the Arch of Titus in Rome along with the Menorah among the spoils plundered from the Temple after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Leviticus 24 specified that twelve loaves of unleavened bread were to be perpetually set out before the Lord, thereby emphasizing the function of the Tabernacle as the dwelling place of God:

***“Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the Lord. Along each row, put some incense as a memorial portion, to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the Lord by fire. This bread is to be set before the Lord regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the Lord by fire.”*** (Leviticus 24:5-9)

Based upon this command the bread of the presence was also designated as ***“the bread that is continually there.”*** (Numbers 4:7) The preparation of this sacred bread was entrusted to the priests:

***“The Levitical clan of Kohathites was charged with the weekly task of baking the bread and arranging the loaves on the table. This was apparently a specialized skill, and in the days of the Second Temple it seems to have been the preserve of the house of Garmu, ‘which kept the process a closely guarded trade secret.’”*** (Sarna, p. 164)

Unlike pagan offerings of food for the gods, and expression of the superstition that it was necessary for gods and goddesses to be sustained by physical nourishment provided by their devotees, the bread of the presence signified the sustenance and life which God provided His people by the reality of His presence among them. This is indicated by the fact that after its ritual presentation in the presence of God it was eaten by the priests, as the representatives of the nation. This practice, contradicts the critics’ contention that Israel was simply mimicking pagan custom in this matter.



*“The Vessels of the Tabernacle” by E.M. Lillien*

*moral existence.” (Murphy, 293)*

*“This was called shew-bread or the bread of the face because it was on the table in the Lord’s house, and brought God and man face to face in terms of reconciliation and communion. The table is a place of paternal and hospitable entertainment. The twelve loaves correspond in number to the twelve tribes of Israel...They represent the abounding and all sufficing blessings of eternal life, dispensed by God as He manifests Himself, and dwells among His people. The priest partaking of the bread, represents the family of God bountifully and constantly regaled by Him at His paternal board. The tabernacle swells to its true significance as the heavenly home when God is surrounded by His intelligent creatures, enjoying, each according to the measure of its capacity, the precious sweets of a susceptible*

Jesus reflects this rich tradition when He describes Himself as **“the Bread of Life”** **“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never grow hungry, and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty.”** (John 6:35)

Four groups of golden utensils were also placed upon the Table of the Bread of the Presence – **“And make its plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings.”** Hebrew tradition understood the **“plates”** to be golden molds in which the loaves were placed after baking to retain their shape. The **“dishes”** are identified with a term which refers to palm of the hand and probably refer to the vessels which contained the frankincense which was placed on the table and burned each Sabbath when the bread was removed (Leviticus 24:7). **“Pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings”** may describe the vessels used in the offerings of wine which were poured out upon the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard. The presence of these vessels here could also simply be symbolic of God sustenance of His people, since no libation offerings were actually made within the Holy Place. Such offerings are prohibited on the Incense Altar in (Exodus 30:9) – **“Do not offer on this altar any other incense, or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour a drink offering on it.”**



***“Put the bread of the presence on the table to be before Me at all times.”*** - As the bread of the presence represented the unfailing presence of God among His people and the gifts of life and salvation which His presence imparted to them, so the constant renewal of that bread signified the reality that God’s blessings upon them and love for them would never fail.

### ***Verses 31-40***

***Make a lampstand of pure gold and hammer it out, base and shaft; its flower-like buds, cups and blossoms shall be of one piece with it. Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand - three on one side and three on the other. Three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on one branch, three on the next branch, and the same for all six branches extending from the lampstand. And on the lampstand there are to be four cups shaped like buds and blossoms. One bud shall be on the first pair of branches extending from the lampstand, a second bud under the second pair, and a third bud under the third pair – six branches in all. The buds and branches shall be of one piece with the lampstand, hammered out of pure gold. Then make its seven lamps and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it. Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold. A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all these accessories. See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.***



***Modern Replica of the Menorah  
Prepared by the Temple Institute in  
Jerusalem for Installation in the  
Third Temple***

***“Make a lampstand of pure gold ...”*** The golden lampstand was the second major furnishing of the Holy Place. It stood on the south side of the chamber, opposite the Table of the Presence. The magnificent seven branched Menorah has become the traditional emblem of Judaism. *“The seven branched menorah has remained the pervasive symbol of Judaism...Because the menorah has always been imbued with emotive and conceptual significance for Jews, it was adopted as the emblem of the state of Israel.”* (Sama, p. 165) A massive reconstruction of the menorah stands today in front of the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament. The text involves a number of technical obscurities and omissions which make a precise reconstruction of the lampstand more difficult. Rabbinic tradition indicates that Moses also had difficulty conceptualizing the object and that God therefore showed him a visual image of the lampstand (cf. Numbers 8:4).

*“Although the instructions about the menorah are very detailed, the text is obscure on many points and is characterized by a paucity of verbs of action, which complicates our understanding. Further, we are not told whether the lamps on the six side branches were level with that of the central shaft, and no information is forthcoming as to the material, clay or metal, from which the lamps were to be made. Also, for reasons unknown, the dimensions of the lampstand are not given. Equally exceptional is the speculation as to the weight of the gold from which it was to be manufactured (vs. 39). Another unique feature is the requirement that the entire object be fashioned out of one solid block of gold; the other articles of furniture were made of wood overlaid with gold. Finally, some of the technical vocabulary is still imperfectly understood.” (Sama, p. 164)*

The typical identification of the menorah as a candelabra or candlestick is anachronistic since the use of candles did not develop until the Roman period. Accordingly, most contemporary Bible translations more accurately identify the menorah as a **“lampstand,”** that is, a structure designed to hold seven olive oil lamps. The Hebrew word *“menorah”* is derived from a root which means *“to burn”* or *“to shine.”*

*“The ancient lamp was an oil lamp, its design changing somewhat in different periods. The most ancient and simplest form of it was a kind of small, round saucer, made in terracotta, the rim of which was pinched together at one point so as to form a spout, from which protruded the tip of the wick that was dipped in the oil of the saucer. In order that the light of the wick, which burnt at the point of its protrusion from the spout, might cast its light down on whatever a person wanted to see, it was necessary to place the lamp on an object that was high enough for the purpose, and to position it in such a way that the object on which it was standing should not obscure the flame of the wick below. Hence, the idea was not hard to conceive of designing a more perfect form of lamp, namely a lamp and a stand joined together.” (Cassutto, p. 340)*

The practical function of the lamp stand was to provide light for the dark interior of the Holy Place. However, given the ornate design, quality of material, and elaborate detail of description it is evident that the menorah was a great deal more significant than a mere light fixture. This magnificent lampstand was to serve as yet another symbol of the presence of God in the midst of His people. In 1 Samuel 3:3 the menorah is called **“the Lamp of God.”**

Like all of the other furnishings which pertained directly to God and His presence within the sanctuary, the lampstand was to be fashioned **“of pure gold.”** As previously noted in reference to the Ark, this was gold which had been repeatedly refined to remove any trace of alloy or impurity. Accordingly, the lampstand is referred to as **“the pure gold lampstand”** to highlight the particularly precious/costly material from which it had been made (Exodus



*The Menorah Sculpture Outside The Israeli Parliament*

31:8; 39:37; Leviticus 24:4) Such gold would be relatively soft which would have resulted in structural weakness in an object of this design (particularly one which was to be moved regularly). This has led modern scholars to suggest that there may have been a crossbar connecting the seven branches just under the lamps, thus providing additional support. Although the text makes no mention of such a supporting beam that would not necessarily preclude the possibility.

**“Base and shaft”** - The Hebrew text literally identifies the base as *“loins”* or *“thigh”*, This would seem to suggest that the trunk of the lamp stand gradually increased in width toward the bottom - a reverse, as it were, of the body at the pelvis where the thighs come together. This would provide the lampstand with a heavy, stable foundation to support the outstretched branches above. The menorah of the enlarged Second Temple, depicted on the Arch of Titus, displays an elaborate hexagon base adorned with scenes from classical mythology. Assuming the accuracy of the image, the would have been a Herodian innovation which would have infuriated pious Jews, no doubt to the king's delight. The central trunk of the lampstand – **“shaft”** - is labeled with the Hebrew word for *“cane”* or *“reed.”* The word refers that an upright cylindrical shaft extending from the base. The mixed metaphor of body language with botany is somewhat perplexing, but each image serves to convey the appropriate concept. The central trunk of the lampstand, like the branches which would extend from it, was to be adorned with ornate golden **“flower-like cups, buds and blossoms.”** work of art. The text further notes that the entire assembly was to **“be of one piece with it,”** that is, the entire lampstand was to be fashioned from

one solid block of gold. This would certainly have presented the artisans with unique challenges. Commentators have sought to evade the sense of the text because of the technical difficulties represented. Dr. Stuart theorizes: *“Even if the various parts of the lampstand were first made separately (a strong likelihood), they were all joined together seamlessly, probably by heating and beating, as has been the means of shaping and joining gold for millennia.”* (Stuart, p. 578) The phrase, however, is unambiguous. The menorah was to be fashioned from one piece of gold from beginning to end. The finished masterpiece would have represented the pinnacle of the craftsman’s art.



*The Temple Menorah on the Arch of Titus in Rome*

***“Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand ...”*** - Three branches were to extend from either side of the central trunk, resulting in a total of seven lamps. Once again, as in reference to the central trunk, the Hebrew noun used in reference to the branches is *“cane”* or *“reed.”* The repetition of this noun suggests to some linguists that the branches of the menorah were straight, projecting diagonally from the upright center, rather than the curved branches traditionally associated with the great lampstand. The sacred seven evoked the seven days of creation and the establishment of the Sabbath. It signified the perfection and completeness which characterized all the work of God. The lamp stand’s trunk and six branches unmistakably presented the image of a tree. That image is further reinforced by the ornate decorations which were to adorn the branches: ***“Three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on one branch, three on the next branch, and the same for all six branches.”*** The same configuration of the blossoms of the almond



*A Priest Lighting the Lamps of the Menorah Within the Holy Place of the Tabernacle*

were to be placed at the point where each set of branches joined the central upright stem. Nahum Sama suggests that the ultimate reference in the imagery of the lampstand was to the Tree of Life in Paradise. The selection of the almond tree would also have been particularly significant to the Hebrews:

*“The trunk, with its branches extending on either side - unmistakably evokes the image of a tree. Quite possibly it represents the Tree of Life. The inflorescence of the almond tree most certainly bears symbolic value, for that tree is the earliest Spring flowering plant in the land of Israel, often even before the end of February. The stem ‘sh-k-d’ means ‘to be watchful, wakeful, vigilant’ thus, the almond flower is a symbol of life renewed and sustained. The number seven, the totality of the lamps, is the outstanding symbolic number in the Bible, and expression of completeness and perfection. Finally, the lights themselves symbolize the most powerful symbol of all, for light imitates both life itself and the Giver of all life. This is the interpretation given in Shabbat 22b: The light of the menorah is the testimony that the Divine Presence resides in the midst of Israel.” (Sarna, p. 165)*

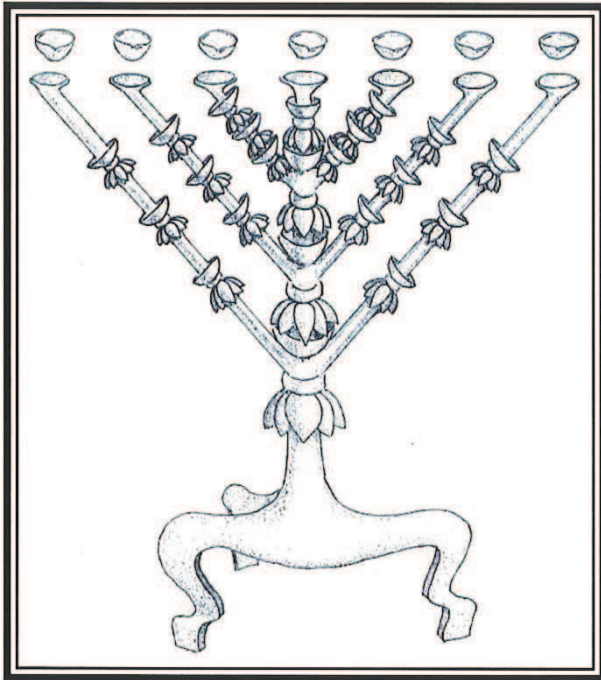
***“The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lampstand, hammered out of pure gold”*** - Once again, the text emphasizes that this exquisite symbol of God’s presence within the Tabernacle was to be a unique masterpiece, created from a single piece of the purest gold, rather than a composite assembled from individual parts. The Hebrew phrase literally reads *“they shall be of it.”* Cassutto explains the Hebrew text:

*“The sense of the sentence is as follows; also the knobs of the branches, that is, the knobs beneath the point where the pairs of branches go out, shall be made of it, of the lampstand, of the same plate of gold, and so, too, their joints, the points at which the side branches radiate from the central shaft; in this case too the construction must not take the form of uniting segments by beating out - the joints of the branches shall likewise be of one piece with the lampstand.. To sum up; the entire lampstand and all its adornments were to be wholly one piece of hammered work of pure gold.”* (Cassutto, p. 344)

The repeated emphasis of the text upon the necessity of fashioning the lampstand from a single piece of gold would appear designed to convey the concepts of unity, strength and stability. As there is only one God, so the one God is the only source of light and life for His chosen people. 19<sup>th</sup> Century commentator Henry Soltau perceived in this emphasis a most significant insight into the nature of the Messiah Jesus, the Light of the World, who is the single source of light and life for His people in every age:

*“This present to us a type of Christ Himself, as the source from whence the Church proceeds, as well as its eternal support, and in whom it abides in indissoluble union....The six branches spring from and are dependent upon the shaft of the candlestick. And thus Christ is the pillar of support and life of the Church; all rest on Him, all proceed from Him, His life, His strength, His firmness, His glory and beauty are theirs in blessed dependence upon Him, and owing its existence to Him the Church abides unchangeably united to its glorious Head; one life pervades it all, one Spirit flows through all its members, one glory and beauty is alike in every portion of every part; and yet all is traced up to its center and its source - Christ ‘in whom it is all fitly framed together,’ and from Whom it all proceeds. And the wise artisan has wrought this central stem and its branches of solid, beaten gold; firmness and stability are its chief characteristics.”* (Soltau, p. 7 5)

***“Then make its seven lamps and set them on it so they light the space in front of it.”*** – The language of the phrase, particularly in the English translation, suggests that the lamps themselves were separate from the lampstand. This would have facilitated the task of the priests in trimming the wicks and cleaning the lamps. Rabbinic tradition indicates that the lamps were fashioned from terra-cotta and were replaced within the golden lampstand as necessary. This would have been consistent with customary usage in ancient times.

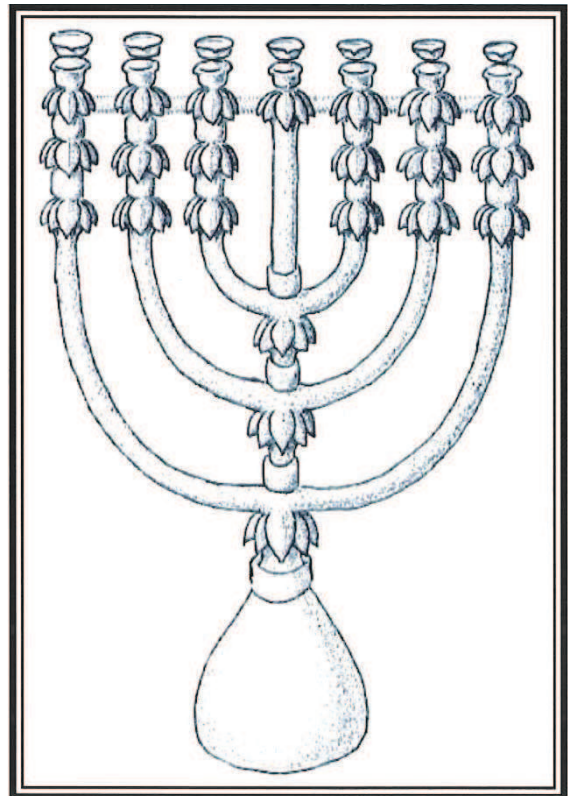


**“Rabbi Maimonides Reconstruction of the Menorah”**

**“So they light the space in front of it”** - The lamps were placed in such a way that their aligned wicks all burned toward the north which would project their illumination across the Holy Place toward the golden Table of the Presence. Their shadows would be cast back against the south wall behind the lampstand. Some have suggested that this specification was superfluous. However, this placement instruction served both a practical and a theological purpose. In a practical sense it provided ample lighting for the priests to carry out their responsibilities within the Holy Place. Theologically, God herewith reminded the people that there would have been no need to orient some or all of the menorah’s light toward the Holy of Holies and the Ark for God did not require such assistance:

*“This is not mere common sense. The Israelites might have assumed they should orient the lamps, (which were oil bowls, with a pinched edge out of which hung a saturated wick so as to cast the most light) in the direction of the Holy of Holies, the room containing the Ark. But God wanted the lamps to light the Holy Place more for the benefit of the priests who ministered there than for Himself. In other words, again this was evidence of the fact that the Israelites were being informed that God did not need the lampstand to see; it was for His servants primarily.”* (Stuart, pp. 580 - 581)

**“Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold. A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all these accessories.”** - The previous instruction (25:31) that the lampstand itself was to be constructed of **“pure gold”** - that is, gold that had been repeatedly refined to remove any trace of alloy or impurity - is here repeated and extended to the vessels and implements which would be used in connection with the lampstand. The **“wick trimmers”** were tongs or tweezers used to manipulate the wicks floating in the oil and trim



**“Traditional Menorah Design”**



*“The Golden Accessories of the Menorah”  
Reconstructed by the Temple Institute in Jerusalem*

them to the proper length for maximum effectiveness and prevent excessive flaring which would create a residue of soot within the Holy Place. The same word occurs in Isaiah 6:6 in reference to the tongs with which the seraph withdrew a coal from the altar before the throne of God: ***“Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar.”*** The ***“trays”*** were firepans used to carry the burning coals from which the wicks of the menorah would be kindled and remove the ashes of the burned wicks. All of this - for both the lampstand and its implements - would require ***“a talent of pure gold.”*** There was no uniform system of weight and measure among the Hebrews at this early date. A talent was 3,000 shekels. Scholars agree that the weight of the gold in this instance would have been around seventy-five pounds, the great majority of which would have been used for the menorah itself.

***“See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”*** – The Menorah is clearly the most complex design presented thus far. As noted above (p. 1091), the Talmud indicates that Moses had difficulty conceptualizing this magnificent lampstand. To accommodate that difficulty, God actually showed Moses a heavenly prototype during his sojourn upon Mount Sinai. That which is presented here is merely a summary of what Moses was shown. The details of that divine design were evidently communicated orally to Bezalel and the craftsmen who would actually build the Tabernacle and its furnishings. The consequence of this approach had been significant disparity among rabbis and scholars as the configuration and appearance of the Menorah. ***“We cannot, therefore, know exactly what the lampstand was to be like; what we can know is generally its structure and motifs. The particulars were in the oral ‘blueprints’ Moses conveyed to the craftsmen from images***



*revealed to him by God.*” (Stuart, p. 581) The reference to **“the pattern shown you on the mountain”** further reinforces the fact that every detail of the Tabernacle and its design was determined by God Himself. Stephen noted this reality in His enumeration of the blessings which God had bestowed upon Israel: **“Our forefathers had the tabernacle of the Testimony with them in the desert. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen.”** (Acts 7:44) In this sense, the Tabernacle as the dwelling place of God among His people was a preview of heaven, in the same way that all of the services and sacrifices of the Tabernacle prefigured the sacrificial death of the Messiah through whom believers would gain access to the heavenly presence of God.

The history and fate of the Menorah has been the object of considerable investigation and speculation. When Israel entered the Promised Land in the days of Joshua the Tabernacle was permanently erected at Shiloh, just northeast of Bethel in the territory of Ephraim (Joshua 18:1). There is no reference to the Menorah or the status of the Tabernacle in the chaos of the closing days of the judges when the ark was lost to the Philistines and subsequently returned and housed at Kiriath Jearim (1 Samuel 7:2). When Solomon built the temple he installed ten lampstands of pure gold in the Holy Place of the Sanctuary (1 Kings 7:49; 2 Chronicles 4:20). The texts do not refer to the original Menorah of the Tabernacle in Solomon’s Temple, although rabbinic tradition assumed that it was present, placed in the center of the ten additional lampstands. Jeremiah’s list of the Babylonian plunder of the Temple includes: **“the basins, censers, sprinkling bowls, pots, lampstands, dishes and bowls used for drink offerings - all that were made of pure gold or silver.”** (Jeremiah 52:19) Again, it is unclear whether the lampstands to which the prophet referred included the original menorah of the Tabernacle. However, the lampstands are omitted from the list of Temple property seized by Nebuzaradan, the Captain of the Babylonian Royal Guard, to whom the destruction and plunder of the Temple was entrusted (2 Kings 25:13 - 15) . This is especially puzzling in that the lampstands accessories are included on the list: **“They also took away the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, dishes and all the bronze articles used in the Temple service. The Commander of the Imperial Guard took away the censers and sprinkling bowls - all that were made of pure gold or silver.”** The mystery deepens in light of the Talmud’s assertion that the Tabernacle Menorah was among the items hidden by God Himself prior to the Babylonian destruction of the Temple.

*“When the temple was destroyed five things were hidden that have never been seen again; the Ark, the Menorah, the fires, the Holy Spirit, and the cherubim. They will remain hidden until the Temple is rebuilt. Then God will return them to their places and make Jerusalem joyous.”* (Schwartz, p. 425)

If the Menorah of the Tabernacle still remained in the first Temple at the time of its destruction it would certainly have been among the most valuable treasures seized by the Babylonians, both because of its value as a national symbol to the Jews and its intrinsic worth as a massive piece of pure gold. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century French historicist painter Georges

Roche-grosse dramatically depicted the moment when the soldiers of Cyrus entered the throne room of Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon in his magnificent painting *“The Death of Babylon”* (1891). In order to convey the idea of Babylon’s fall as God’s judgement upon those who had destroyed His Temple, the golden Menorah stands prominently in the foreground among the Temple treasures which the king had brazenly used to adorn his feast.



*“The Death of Babylon” by Georges Rochegrosse*

Ezra 1:7 - 11 reports that Cyrus authorized the return of whatever Temple property remained intact when he permitted the Jews to go back to Jerusalem. Historians generally agree that it would have been unlikely for the lampstands to remain given the fact that gold was typically melted down for use in the king’s treasury. The second Temple was subsequently plundered by Antiochus IV. When the Maccabees recaptured the Temple a candelabrum was improvised using the hollow iron heads of their spears so that the Temple lamps might be immediately rekindled. By the time the sanctuary was formally rededicated, the sanctuary, new holy vessels of gold had been fabricated, among them the Menorah (1 Maccabees 4:49). The Menorah was used as an emblem of the Jewish nation on the coins minted by the Maccabean priest/kings. The lampstand depicted on the coins rests upon a three legged base.

The Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 B.C. After slaughtering hundreds of priests in the outer courts, he entered the Holy of Holies. Josephus includes the Menorah



*“The Triumph of Pompey Celebrating the Conquest of Jerusalem”*

in his account of the tragedy: *“For Pompey went into it and not a few of those who were with him also, and saw all that which it was unlawful for any other men to see, but only for the high priests. There were in that temple the golden table, the holy candlestick, and the holy vessels...Pompey touched nothing of all this on account of his regard to religion.”* (Josephus, *Antiquities* XIV,4:4) Nine years later, in 54 B.C., Crassus, another Roman general, also pillaged the temple, but a wise priest named Eleazar, who was the custodian of the Holy Place, tricked him into allowing the Menorah and other furnishing to remain undisturbed. The final Roman desecration of the Temple took place in A.D. 70 when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the legions of Titus. Their plunder of the



*The Depiction of the Menorah on the Arch of Titus*

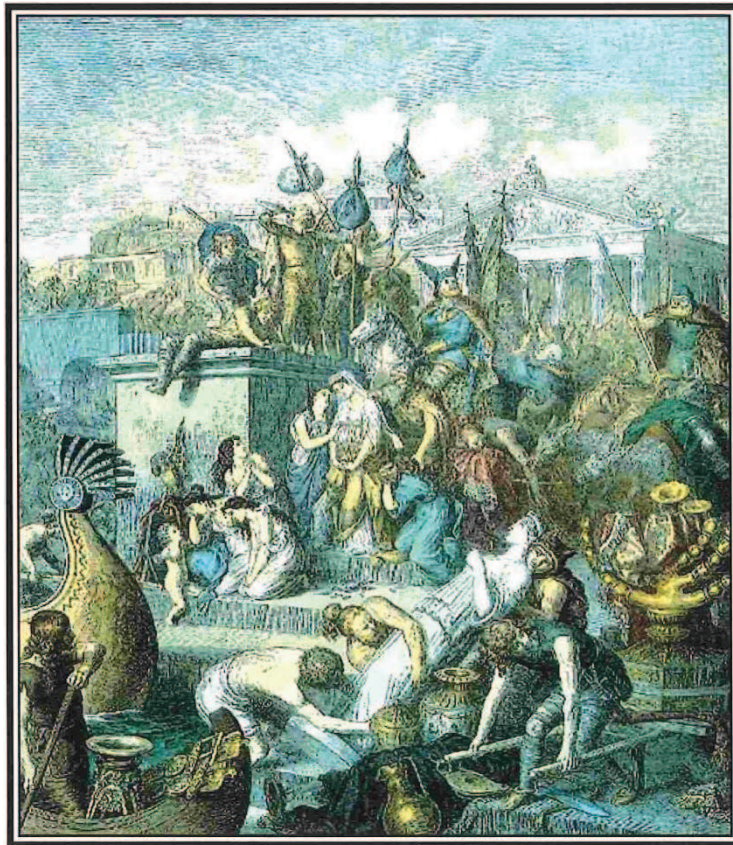


*“The Vandals Sack of Rome” by Karl Briullov*

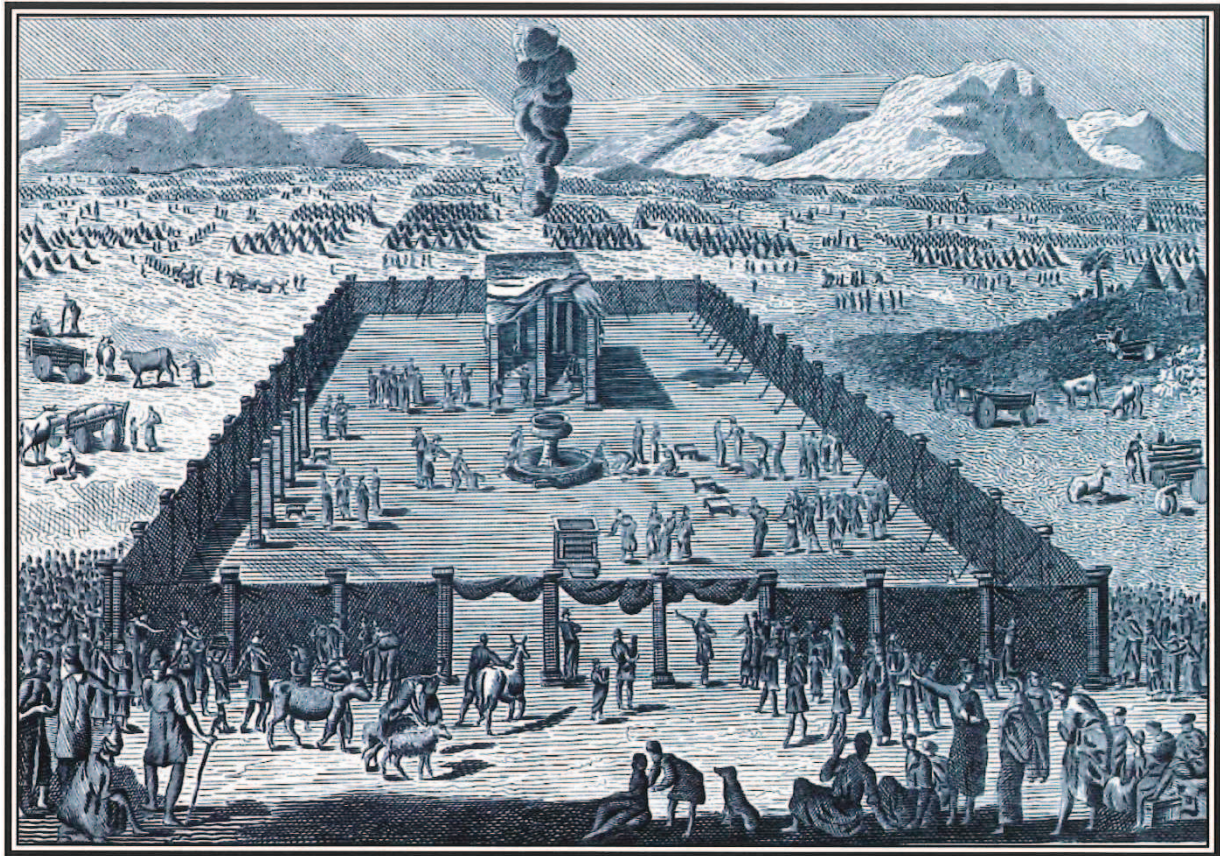
Menorah was immortalized on the triumphal Arch of Titus which remains in Rome to this day. Historians note that the base of the Menorah depicted on the Arch is disproportionately large. The three legged base of the Maccabees has been replaced by a large two tiered hexagon, profusely decorated in gold relief. They speculate that the base was a typically grandiose addition provided by King Herod. It may be that the original base had been damaged in the tumultuous years which preceded the imposition of the “*pax romana.*” After its display before the Roman mob in the triumphal procession, the Menorah, along with the other temple treasures were placed in the Temple of Peace by order of the Emperor Vespasian. Vespasian’s Temple of Peace was destroyed by the mad Emperor Commodus in A.D. 191. Evidently, the second Temple Menorah survived the fire. The ancient historian Procopius reports that it was a part of the plunder seized by the Vandals, who sacked the city of Rome in A.D. 455. They carried the Menorah back to their capital, the ancient city of Carthage on the coast of North Africa. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russian artist Karl Briullov depicts the climactic moment when the Vandal Chieftain Geneseric, orders that the golden Menorah be carried off to his ship as the grief stricken bishop of Rome watches helplessly. Eighty years later, the Byzantine general Belisarius, destroyed the Vandal kingdom in Italy and North Africa at the order of the Emperor Justinian in A.D. 534. Belisarius regained the sacred relic and the Menorah was carried in his triumphal procession through the streets of Constantinople later that year. Procopius concluded his fascinating story with the information that a superstitious Justinian promptly returned the Menorah to Jerusalem lest he incur the wrath of God:

*“Among these were the treasures of the Jews which Titus had brought to Rome after the capture of Jerusalem. And one of the Jews, seeing these things, approached one of those known to be close to the emperor and said; ‘I think it inexpedient to carry these treasures into the palace in Byzantium. Indeed it is not possible for them to be elsewhere than in the place where Solomon, the king of the Jews, formerly placed them. For it was because of these that Geneseric captured the palace of the Romans, and that now the Byzantine army has captured that of the Vandals. When this had been brought to the ears of the emperor, he became afraid and quickly sent everything to the sanctuaries of the Christians in Jerusalem.’”* (*History of the Wars*, 4.9)

There is no corroboration for this tale elsewhere, nor is there any mention of Temple treasures in connection with the churches of Jerusalem. An intriguing sidelight, which lends some credence at least to the proposition that the Vandals seized Temple furnishings in their sack of Rome is provided in the Arabic history of Ibn Abd-el-hakam - a 9<sup>th</sup> century Egyptian scholar. Abd-el-hakam writes that when the Moors conquered the Vandal kingdom in Spain they discovered “*the Table of Solomon*” in the city of Toledo. This would appear to be a reference to the Temple’s golden Table of the Showbread. Abd-el-hakam indicates that the table was taken to the Grand Caliph in Damascus in Syria. (*History of the Conquest of Spain*, 21). After its alleged appearance in a Byzantine triumphal procession, the second Temple Menorah also disappears from history.



*“The Vandals Sack of Rome” – 19<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving*

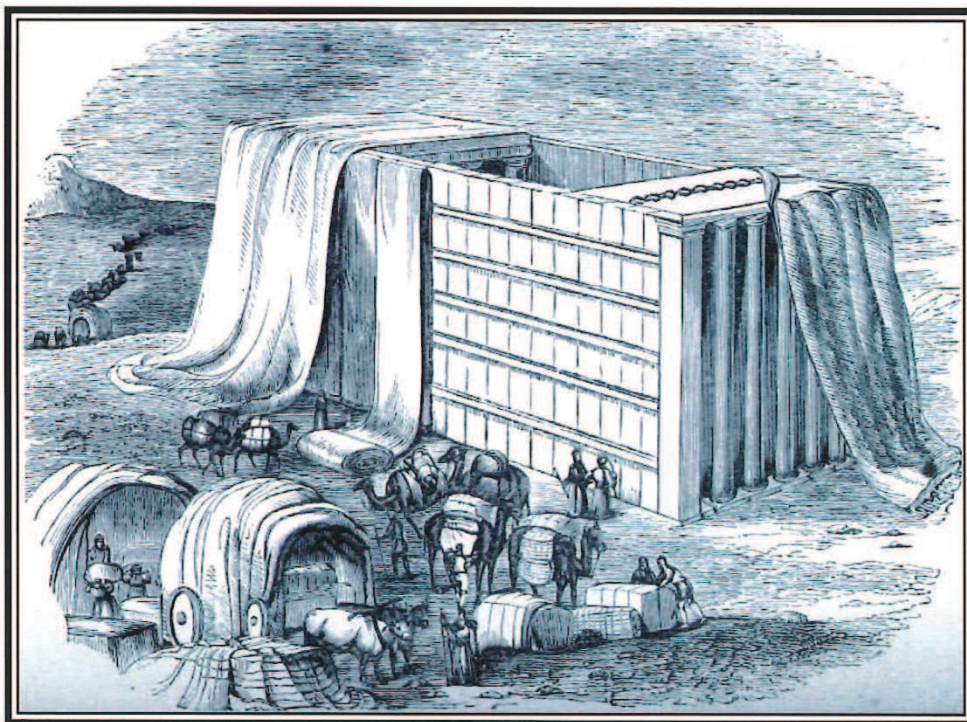


*“The Tabernacle in the Wilderness” – 18<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving*

## *Exodus Chapter 26*

*(1) Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked into them by a skilled craftsman. (2) All the curtains are to be the same size- twenty - eight cubits long and four cubits wide. (3) Join five of the curtains together and do the same with the other five. (4) Make loops of blue material along the end of the curtain in one set, and do the same with the end curtain in the other set. (5) Make fifty loops on one curtain and fifty loops on the end curtain of the other set with the loops opposite each other. (6) Then make fifty gold clasps to fasten the curtains together so that the Tabernacle is a unit. (7) Make curtains of goat hair for the tent over the Tabernacle - eleven together. (8) All eleven curtains are to be the same size – thirty cubits long and four cubits wide. (9) Join five of the curtains together into one set and the other six into the another set. Fold the sixth curtain double at the front of the tent. (10) Make fifty loops along the edge of the curtain in one set and also along the edge of the end curtain in the other set. (11) Then make fifty bronze clasps and put them in the loops to fasten the tent together as a unit. (12) As for the addition length of the tent curtain, the additional length that is left over is to hang down at the rear of the Tabernacle. (13) The tent curtains will be a cubit longer on both sides; what is left will hang over the sides of the Tabernacle as to cover it. (14) Make for the tent a covering of ram skins dyed red, and over that a covering of the hides of sea cows. (15) Make upright frames of acacia wood for the Tabernacle. (16) Each frame is to be ten cubits long and*

*a cubit and a half wide, (17) with two projections set parallel to each other. Make all the frames of the Tabernacle in this way. (18) Make twenty frames for the south side of the Tabernacle (19) and make forty silver bases to go under them- two bases for each frame, one under each projection. (20) For the other side, the north side of the Tabernacle, make twenty frames (21) and forty silver bases, two under each frame. (22) Make six frames for the far end, that is, the west end of the Tabernacle, (23) and make two frames for the corners at the far end. (24) At these two corners, they must be double, all the way from the bottom to the top, and fitted into a single ring. Both shall be like that. (25) So there will be eight frames and sixteen silver bases - two under each frame. (26) Also make crossbars of acacia wood: (27) five for the frames on the other side, and five for the frames on the west, at the far end of the Tabernacle. (28) The center crossbar is to extend from end to end at the middle of the frames. (29) Overlay the frames with gold and make gold rings to frame the crossbars. Also overlay the crossbars with gold. (30) Set up the Tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain. (31) Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen, with cherubim worked into it by a skilled craftsman. (32) Hang it with gold hooks on the four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases. (33) Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the Ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. (34) Place the table on the outside of the curtain on the north side of the Tabernacle and put the lampstand opposite it on the south side. (35) For the entrance to the tent, make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen - the work of an embroiderer. (37) Make gold hooks for this curtain and five posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold. And cast five bronze bases for them.*



*“The Panels and Curtains of the Tabernacle” – 19<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving*

## ***Verses 1-6***

***Make the Tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn with cherubim worked into them by a skilled craftsman. All the curtains are to be the same size-twenty eight cubits long and four cubits wide. Join five of the curtains together and do the same thing with the other five. Make loops of blue material along the edge of the curtain in one set, and do the same with the end curtain in the other set. Make fifty loops on one curtain and fifty loops on the end curtain of the other set, with the loops opposite each other. Then make fifty gold clasps and use them to fasten the curtains together so that the Tabernacle is a unit.***

***“Make the Tabernacle with ten curtains ...”*** - The Tabernacle was an elaborate tent designed to be placed in the middle of the Israelite tent encampment. It was fifteen feet wide, fifteen feet high, and forty - five feet long. The structure was divided into two rooms. The innermost, the Holy of Holies, was a perfect cube, fifteen feet wide, long and high. The outer room, the Holy Place was twice as long (30 feet) with the same width and height. Exodus 26 provides detailed instructions as to the materials to be used and the manner in which the various components of the Tabernacle were to be designed. What the text does not provide, however, is a specific description of how these components were to be assembled. Accordingly, the appearance of the Tabernacle remains the subject of widespread speculation and intense debate among scholars. Umberto Cassutto accurately described the dilemma:

*“The manner of hanging the curtains over the beams is not described in the Bible...Many strange and diverse conjectures have been advanced on the subject, and various extraordinary attempts at reconstruction have been proposed, but the vast majority of them are fanciful and improbable.”*  
(Cassutto, p. 350)

In terms of its exterior appearance, the major bone of contention is whether the roof of the Tabernacle was flat or pitched. The traditional view of the Tabernacle as flat roofed remains the majority opinion but not without significant dissent. Critics point out that if the Tabernacle had a flat roof, it would be absolutely unique among all of the numerous tents utilized across the region throughout the centuries. In his classic study *The Tabernacle of Israel - Its Structure and Symbolism*, renown 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible scholar James Strong forcefully contended for the necessity of a pitched roof. He argued that Verse 7’s distinction between ***“the tent”*** (in reference to the three outer coverings) and ***“the Tabernacle”*** itself (the wooden structure and the ornately embroidered inner covering) required the conclusion that the outer coverings sloped to a peak. This configuration, Strong insisted, is inherent in the word ***“tent.”*** In any case, he concluded, a peaked outer roof above the ceiling was a practical necessity in order to shed the rain and provide ventilation for the inner chambers.



*“As to the roof, the first question that necessarily arises is, Did the edifice have a peak, or was it flat roofed? This is definitely settled by the single word ‘tent’ which is distinctively applied to that portion of the structure erected ‘upon’ the Tabernacle walls, and which no possibility of usage in any language, can mean anything but a canvas covering with a peak. The necessity of shedding rain, and the invariable style of Bedouin encampments, moreover, fix this as an incontrovertible principle of architecture in such cases...The rainfall during the showers in the winter on the Sinai tic peninsula is often prodigious and snow occasionally falls to the depth of several inches in the valleys about Mount Sinai...A flat roof would have become moldy and rotten irretrievably the first month of winter, especially with the fur robes piled on time. Moreover, how unsightly would have been a mere box, like a coffin with a pall over it! A flat canvas roof, no matter how tightly stretched must have sagged, so as to catch tons of water, if impervious, breaking the canvas and indeed causing the whole structure to collapse. Or if, as is more probable the rain would penetrate the canvas bowl, it would deluge the apartments, especially the Most Holy Place where no one was allowed to enter, even if for the purpose of lifting the roof with a rod in order to allow the water to run off In every point of view, the flat roof scheme is utterly impractical.” (Strong, pp. 39 - 40)*

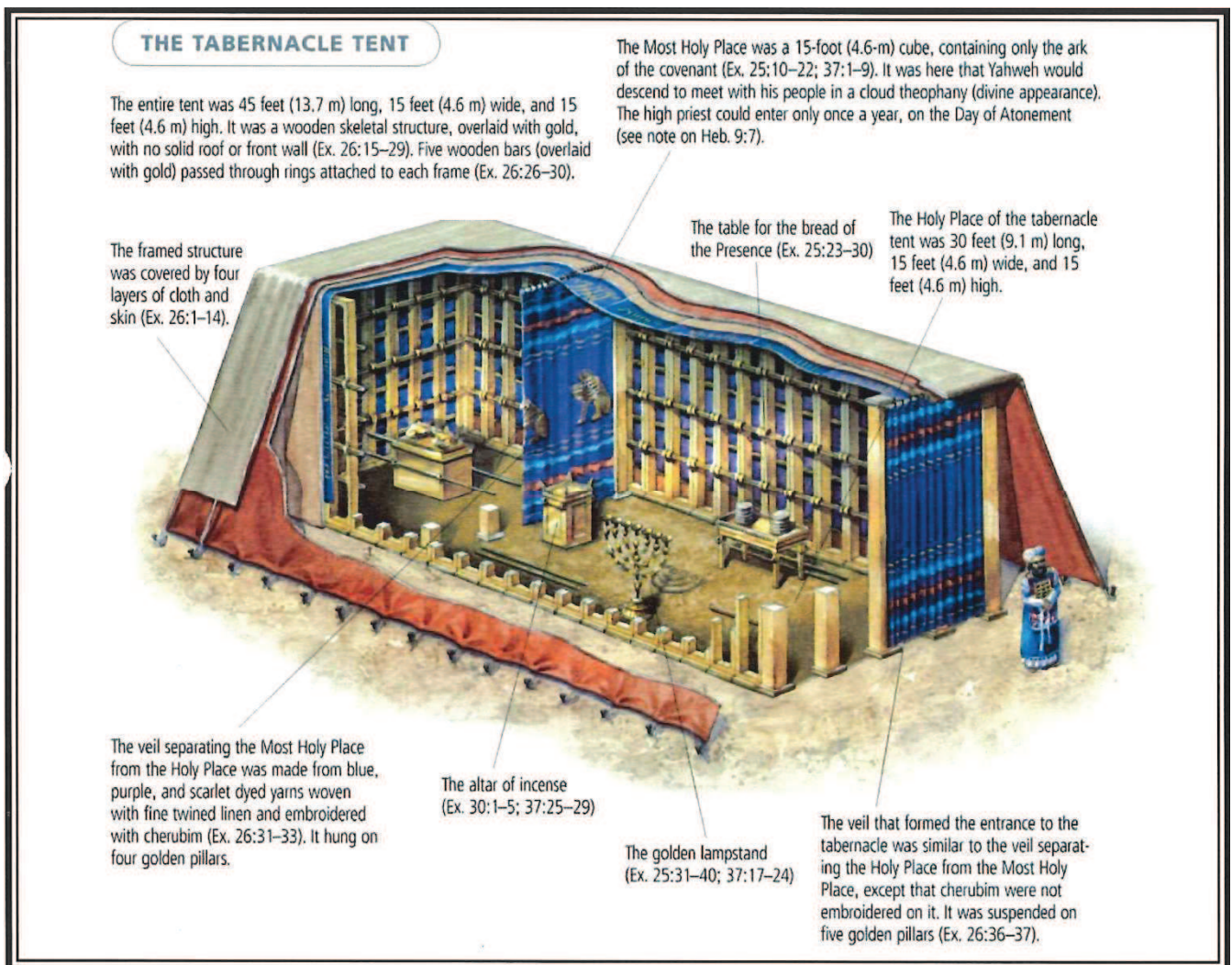
Those who contend for the traditional view that the Tabernacle had a flat roof cite the absence of any mention of a ridgepole or of extended posts to raise a pitched roof over the walls in these detailed instructions as the basis for their rejection of this view. Cassutto spoke for the advocates of the traditional flat roof:



*Depiction of the Tabernacle With a Pitched Roof*

“According to the reconstruction of Schick and Ferguson, for example, the curtains were stretched over very high wooden pillars, far taller than the boards, and they thus formed a lofty tent, majestic even in its imposing measurements, which was fastened to the ground by cords and pegs. But Scripture makes no reference to high pillars or to the cords of the tent or the tabernacle...nor does such a magnificent structure fit the desert conditions.” (Cassutto, p. 350)

In the absence of definitive textual evidence the argument will, no doubt, continue.



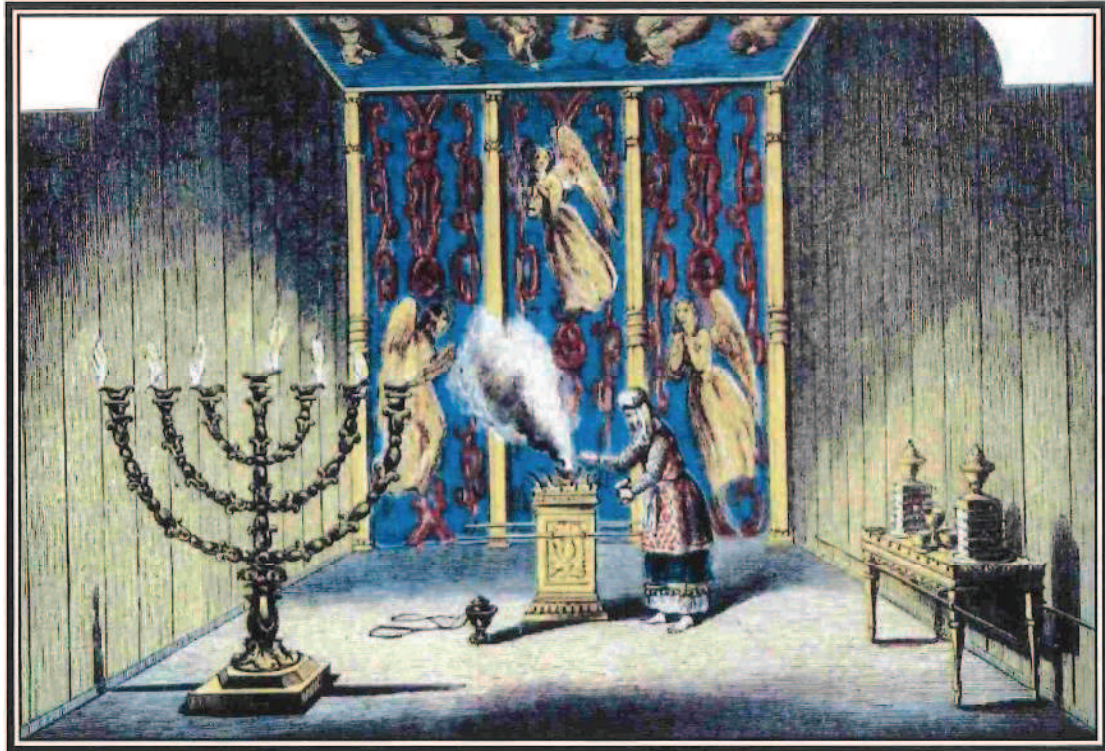
*Traditional View of the Tabernacle With a Flat Roof*

The structure of the Lord’s sanctuary consisted of four layers of fabric and leather which were to be spread out and draped over a framework of gilded wood. The specifications for the tent begin with the innermost curtain which would constitute the interior of the Tabernacle and be seen only by the priests as they conducted the various rituals and services which had been assigned to them. Since this curtain formed the visible walls and ceiling of the Tabernacle, it was to be woven of the finest materials – *“finely twisted linen and blue,*



**purple and scarlet yarn.**” These were the same fabrics which had been specified in the items previously cited for the Tabernacle offering (cf. 25:4). As previously noted (cf. Notes, pp. 1063-1064) these fabrics and the dyes from which they were made were extremely expensive. No cost was to be spared in the preparation of the dwelling place of God. In this way Israel was given the opportunity to glorify the Lord and demonstrate their grateful response to the abundant blessings which He had bestowed upon them. The text does not specify the design of cloth. Some contend that the white linen constituted the basic fabric while the brightly colored yarns were used to embroider the decorative figures of the cherubim into the linen. Others argue the reverse - colored panels with white angels – or that all of the materials were dyed blue purple and red. The reappearance of cherubim on the inner curtain of the sanctuary as over the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant signals once again that this is the dwelling place of God. In our discussion of the Ark we pointed out that these majestic archangels are the beings most intimately connected to God as they surround and support the throne of His glory in heaven. The priests within the Holy Place would literally be surrounded by images of the cherubs who surround God’s throne, and when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies he would have been confronted by both the golden cherubim upon the Ark and the cherubim woven into the fabric of the walls and ceiling. The significance of their prominence throughout the Tabernacle would have been both unmistakable and overwhelming. To borrow the words of Jacob the patriarch at Bethel – **“How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven!”** (Genesis 28:17)

This inner curtain was to consist of ten large panels – **“twenty-eight cubits long and four cubits wide”** - roughly forty - two feet by six feet. The panels were to be permanently sewn together into two larger sections, each made up of five panels. The size of each section would be thirty feet by forty - two feet. The division of the curtain into two pieces was a practical necessity for a shrine that was designed to be portable. The two segments would facilitate the set up and take down of the Tabernacle and make the curtains considerably lighter and easier to handle as they were moved from one place to another. These two sections were to be joined by fifty gold clasps inserted into fifty **“loops of blue material”** sewn into the edge of both sections. The Hebrew text of Verse 3 uses an idiom which refers to two women tightly clasping one another's hands. It literally reads – **“Five of the curtains they shall be fastening, each woman to her sister and five curtain fastening each woman to her sister.”** The combination of these two sections would create a sixty foot tapestry curtain sufficient to provide the ceiling for the forty - five foot length of the structure while also providing the fifteen foot back (west) wall. The forty-two foot width of the curtain was required to reach from the bottom of one fifteen foot wall across the ceiling to the bottom of the other wall. The seam of gold clasps joining the two sections would have extended across the width of the structure over the curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place – **“so that the tabernacle is a unit.”** The golden clasps crossing the ceiling also served a decorative purpose. The Talmud observed that the priests within the chambers of the Tabernacle would see the magnificent cherubim who represented the heavenly throne



*19<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving of the Interior of the Tabernacle*

of God, and in their midst, at the center of the ceiling, the glittering golden clasps which provided a reminder of heaven. As one rabbi noted in the Talmud, “*and the clasps appeared in the Tabernacle like stars in the sky.*” (Cassutto, p. 352)

(

### ***Verses 7-14***

***Make curtains of goat hair for the tent over the Tabernacle - eleven altogether. All eleven curtains are to be the same size - thirty cubits long and four cubits wide. Join five of the curtains together into one set and the other six into another set. Fold the sixth curtain double at the front of the tent. Make fifty loops along the edge of the curtain in one set, and also along the edge of the end curtain in the other set. Then make fifty bronze clasps and put them in the loops to fasten the tent together as a unit. As for the additional length of the tent curtain, the half curtain that is left over is to hang down at the rear of the tabernacle. The tent curtains will be a cubit longer on both sides; what is left will hang over the sides of the Tabernacle so as to cover it. Make for the tent a covering of ram skins dyed red, and over that a covering of the hides of sea cows.***

***“Make curtains of goat hair for the tent over the Tabernacle ...”*** - The text distinguishes between the three protective outer coverings of canvas and leather (***“the tent”*** – Hebrew ***“’ohel”***) and the Tabernacle (Hebrew – ***“mishkan”***) itself which consisted of the wooden framework and the ornately woven tapestry cloth. This distinction, as previously indicated, has led to speculation about the possibility of the configuration of ***“the tent”*** forming a pitched roof over the Tabernacle. The ***“curtains of goat hair”*** which formed the first of the

three protective layers was slightly larger than the tapestry cloth which it covered to enable it to effectively shield the Tabernacle, both from the weather and the gaze of the casual onlooker. While the cloth segments were 42 feet long, the canvas cover was 45 feet long. This would cause it to significantly overlap the cloth which it was designed to protect. The first of the outer layers is a soft goat hair canvas which would also serve to cushion and protect the more delicate fabric beneath it from the two leather coverings above. The canvas was woven of “**goat hair**” which remains the typical material used by the Bedouins of the Middle East to this day. It would have been dark brown or black. It is water repellent and its dark color also deflects the intense heat of the sun. The canvas curtain also included an extra segment, increasing the total from ten to eleven. This would have made the canvas four cubits longer than the cloth cover. The text instructs – “**Fold the sixth curtain double at the front of the tent.**” The significance of the extra segment in the goat hair canvas has been variously explained, depending upon how the it was attached to the other ten and the commentator’s view of the overall tabernacle design. For example:

*“The outer curtain’s eleventh panel must be folded in half, so that the whole covers forty - two cubits, two more than the inner curtain. This excess half curtain is said ‘to lie against the Tent’s front.’ Most likely, the two extra cubits are draped over the opening as a valance to keep out light and rain.” (Propp, p. 505)*

*“The curtain that is reckoned as the sixth...is the first on the eastern side, the one nearest to the entrance. At the point where it actually reached the entrance, ‘at the forefront of the tent,’ it was doubled, that is, it was folded in the middle along its whole length, so that two cubits of its breadth were laid above the first curtain of the Tabernacle and the remaining cubits were folded back and placed beneath the same Tabernacle curtain to cover its edge well and to give it extra protection.” (Cassutto, p. 352)*

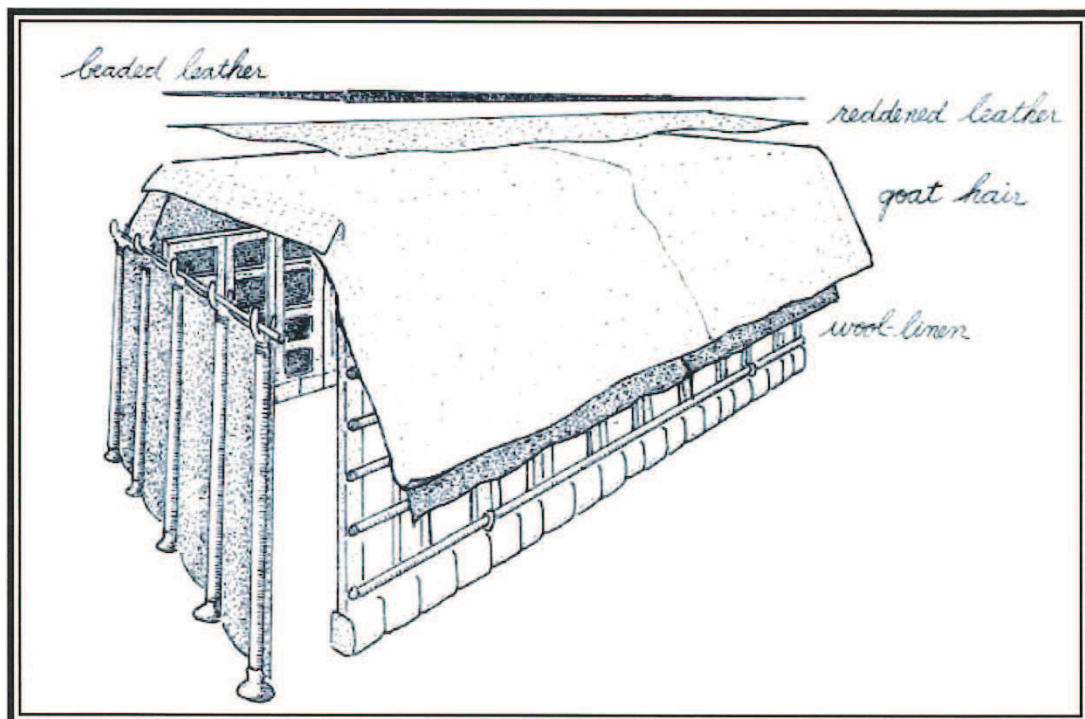
*“One part is formed by sewing five curtains, the other by sewing six curtains together. Half the sixth curtain in this part of the tent is to be doubled, that is, to hang over the front of the Tabernacle. In this way, the seams of the upper curtains would always be over the middle of the lower curtains.” (Murphy, p. 299)*

*“The extra or sixth curtain or width of the second sheet was employed for a peculiar purpose, namely, not as part of the roof covering, but to be wrapped across the front and rear gables. In order to do this, it must have been attached to its fellow-widths, not lengthwise along the side like the others, but at the end of the narrow edge...The peak of the roof, if at an angle of 70 degrees as we have assumed, would be nearly seven and half cubits perpendicular height above the top of the planks, so as nearly to fill the rest of the triangle. The rest would be needed for light and ventilation, but a full current of air would have*

*put out the lights of the candelabrum." (Strong, p. 43)*

The two large sections of the canvas were to be joined with clasps in a manner similar to the gold clasps and blue cords of the embroidered Tabernacle covering. However, the clasps were to be made of bronze and no color was specified for the corded loops. ***“Make fifty loops along the edge of the curtain in one set and also along the edge of the end curtain in the other set. Then make fifty bronze clasps and put them in the loops to fasten the tent together as a unit.”*** (Verses 10 - 11) It is clear that the concern for decorative beauty and the use of particularly precious material which prevailed in the woven inner cover did not apply to the layers of the protective tent. It was not, strictly speaking, a part of the Tabernacle but was only intended to shield and protect the sacred dwelling over which it was to be stretched.

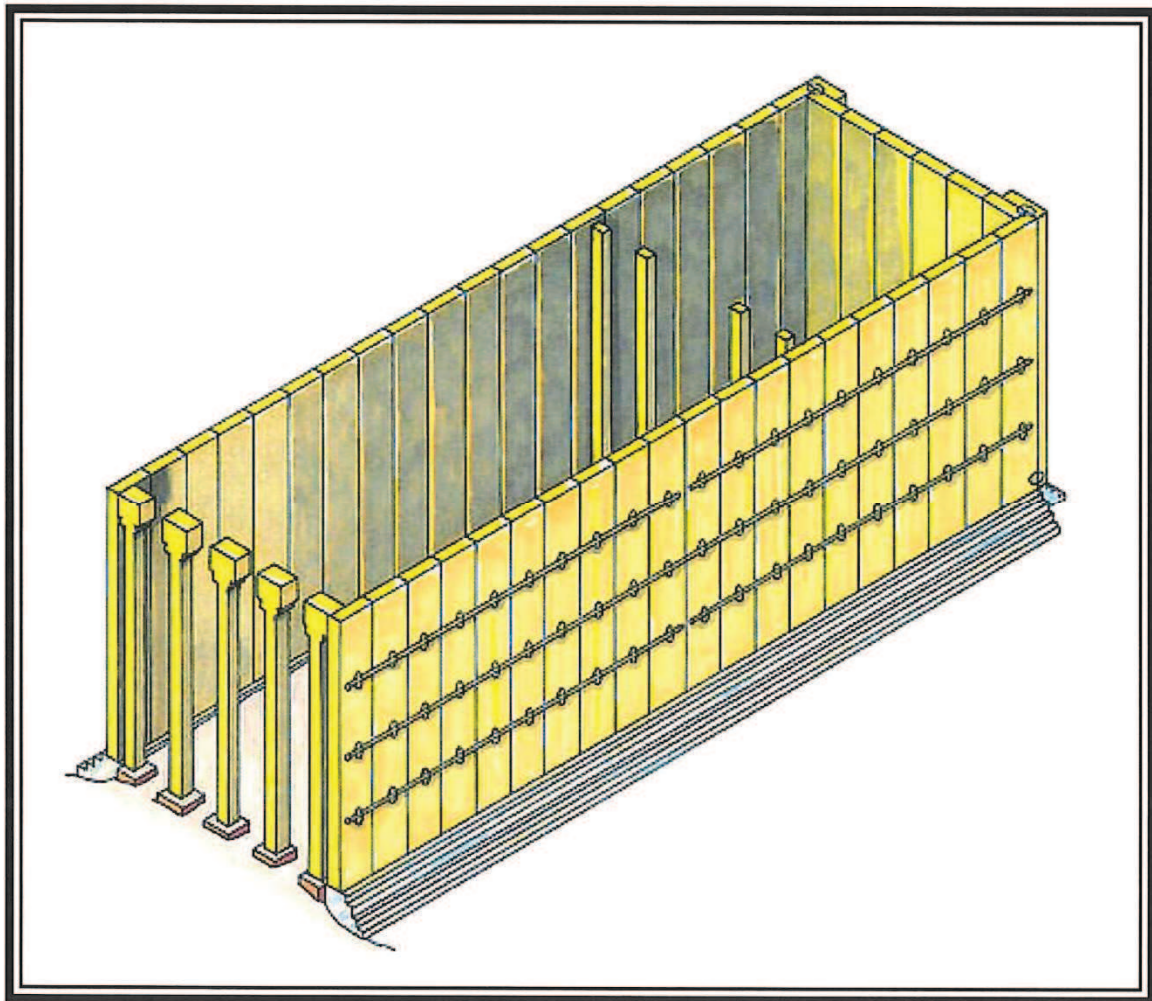
The final two protective layers of the tent were of dyed leather – ***“Make for the tent a covering of ram skins dyed red, and over that a covering of the hides of sea cows.”*** (Verse 14) The dimensions of the two leather curtains are not specified. Rabbinic tradition indicated that the leather covers were ten cubits by thirty and lay flat upon the roof of the sanctuary. The color red, evocative of blood and fire, is traditionally sacred among the bedouin tribes. *“To this day, the Bedouins sometimes spread skins over their tents. Among gentile peoples too, it was customary to use red, which is visible from a distance, to distinguish the sacred tents.”* (Cassutto, p. 353) In this instance, however, the ***“ram skins dyed red”*** were to be covered with hides which had been dyed deep blue and/ or decorated with blue beadwork (Not the NIV’s ***“a covering of the hides of sea cows”*** – (cf. Notes, p. 1092). This color would be equally distinctive and remind the people that the Lord had come down to dwell among them from His throne in the highest heavens.



In keeping with its nature as a summary description of the Tabernacle, with little interest in specific structural details, the text does not describe the manner in which the various layers of covering were to be anchored. Exodus 27:19; 3:18 and 37:20 refer to *“the tent pegs of the Tabernacle.”* *“All the other articles used in the service of the Tabernacle, whatever their function, including all the tent pegs for it, and those for the courtyard at to be of bronze.”* *“All who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded ... the tent pegs for the Tabernacle and for the courtyard and their ropes.”* *“All the tent pegs of the Tabernacle and of the surrounding courtyard were bronze.”* These references would appear to suggest that the coverings were staked down with cords tied to bronze pegs driven into the ground. This would be typical of Bedouin practice throughout the region and would have been a practical necessity given the fierce desert winds which regularly swept through the Sinai.

### *Verses 15-25*

Make upright frames of acacia wood for the Tabernacle. Each frame is to be ten cubits long and a cubit and a half wide, with two projections set parallel to each other. Make all the frames of the Tabernacle in this way. Make twenty frames for the south side of the



*Tabernacle Diagram Showing Solid Gold Plated Planks*

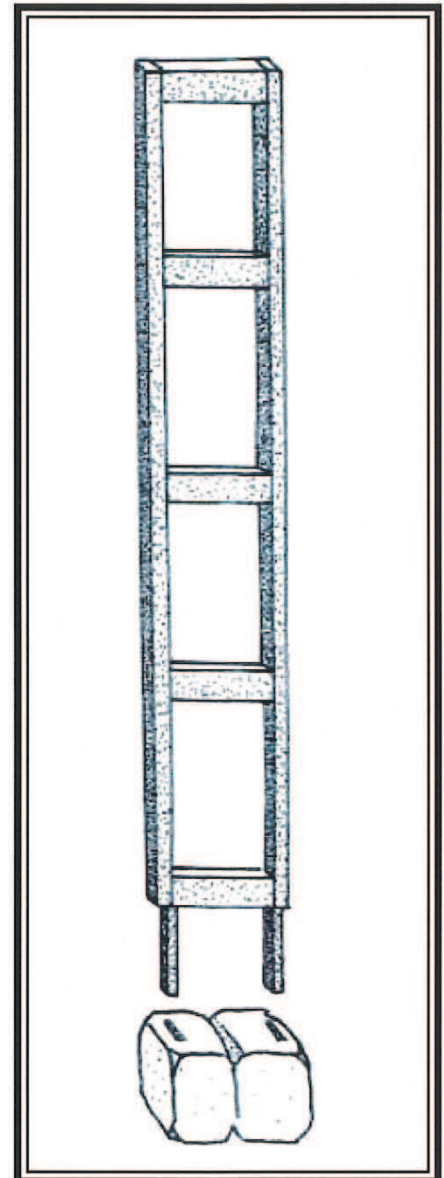


*Tabernacle and make forty silver bases to go under them - two bases under each frame, one under each projection. For the other side, the north side of the Tabernacle, make twenty frames, and forty silver bases - two under each frame. Make six frames for the far end, that is the west end of the Tabernacle, and make two frames for the corners at the far end. At these two corners, they must be double from the bottom all the way to the top, and fitted into a single ring. Both shall be like that. So there will be eight frames and sixteen silver bases, two under each frame.*

*“Make upright frames of acacia wood for the Tabernacle.”* - The Lord’s description of the

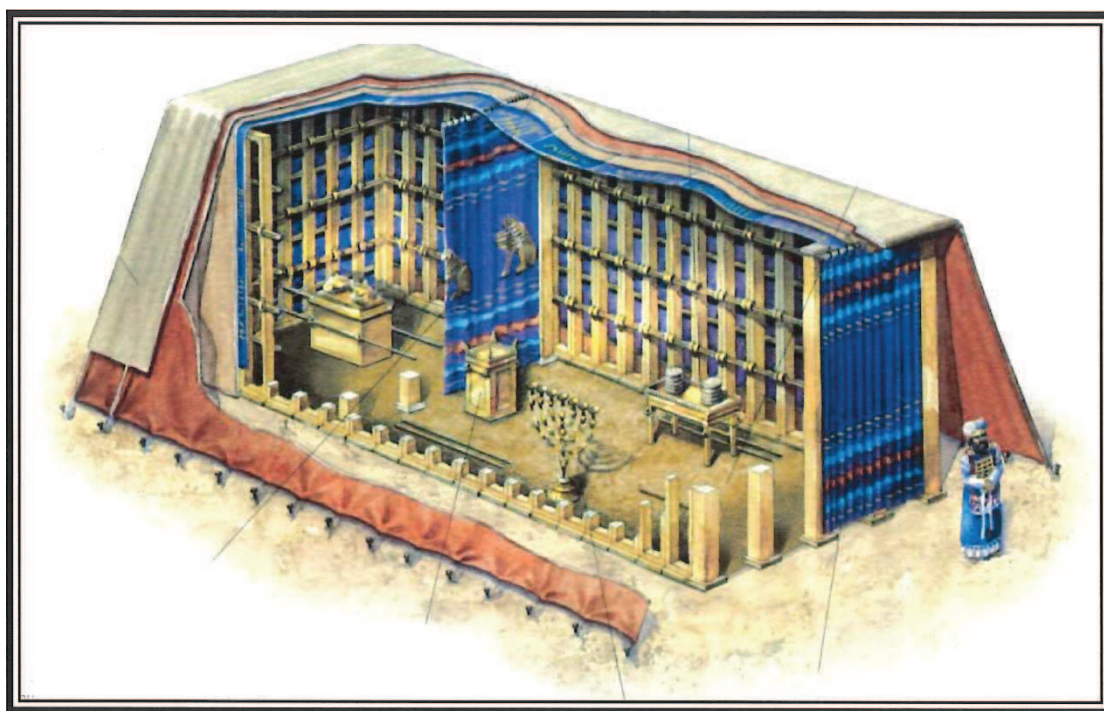
Tabernacle went on to detail the wooden structure of the walls which would support the cloth, canvas, and leather coverings. The framework was to consist of a total of forty - eight uprights and two special corner pieces. The eastern wall at the front of the Tabernacle would remain open, covered only by a curtain. As in each of the preceding specifications, the wood to be utilized was *“acacia wood.”* The Hebrew noun which identifies the uprights is *“kerashim.”* Its meaning is the subject of scholarly disagreement. The NIV’s translation *“frames”* reflects a growing consensus among modern scholars that *“keresh”* in this context describes a ladder - like bracket. The traditional view, expressed in the writings of Josephus and Philo of Alexandria, held that the *“kerashim”* were solid wooden planks, with the result that the interior walls of the Tabernacle were glittering walls of gold. The term itself cannot settle the argument. The major objection to the traditional view is that solid planks covered with gold would have been extremely heavy and therefore difficult to move. The argument is complicated by the fact that while the text provides the height and width of each *“keresh,”* it does not indicate the thickness of the planks or frames.

Josephus offered the following description in *Antiquities of the Jews*: *“There were also pillars made of wood, twenty on each side. They were wrought into a quadrangular figure, in breadth a cubit and a half, but the thickness was four fingers; they had thin plates of gold affixed to them on both sides, inwardly and outwardly.”* (Josephus, p. 72) The weight of such pillars would have been massive, no doubt overwhelming the silver bases which were designed to support them. Each base was fashioned from a talent of silver (Exodus 38:27). The two bases for each *“keresh”* together weighed around 151 pounds. The planks they were to



*“Keres” Depicted As An Open Bracket With It’s Silver Bases*

support them. Each base was fashioned from a talent of silver (Exodus 38:27). The two bases for each *“keresh”* together weighed around 151 pounds. The planks they were to



*Cutaway Diagram of the Tabernacle With Open Panel Walls*

hold up could not have been heavier than they were if the silver bases were to effectively carry out their function. At the same time, it would have been extremely difficult to find acacia trees of sufficient size to produce such planks. The traditional rabbinic view is even less plausible, asserting that each solid panel was a cubit thick. Numbers 7:6 - 7 reports that six ox-carts were allocated for transporting the Tabernacle and its furnishings. Of the six, four were reserved for the Merarites, the clan of Levi specifically responsible for the Tabernacle structure and the Courtyard barrier. The limitations inherent in this system of transport would seem to preclude thick solid planks.

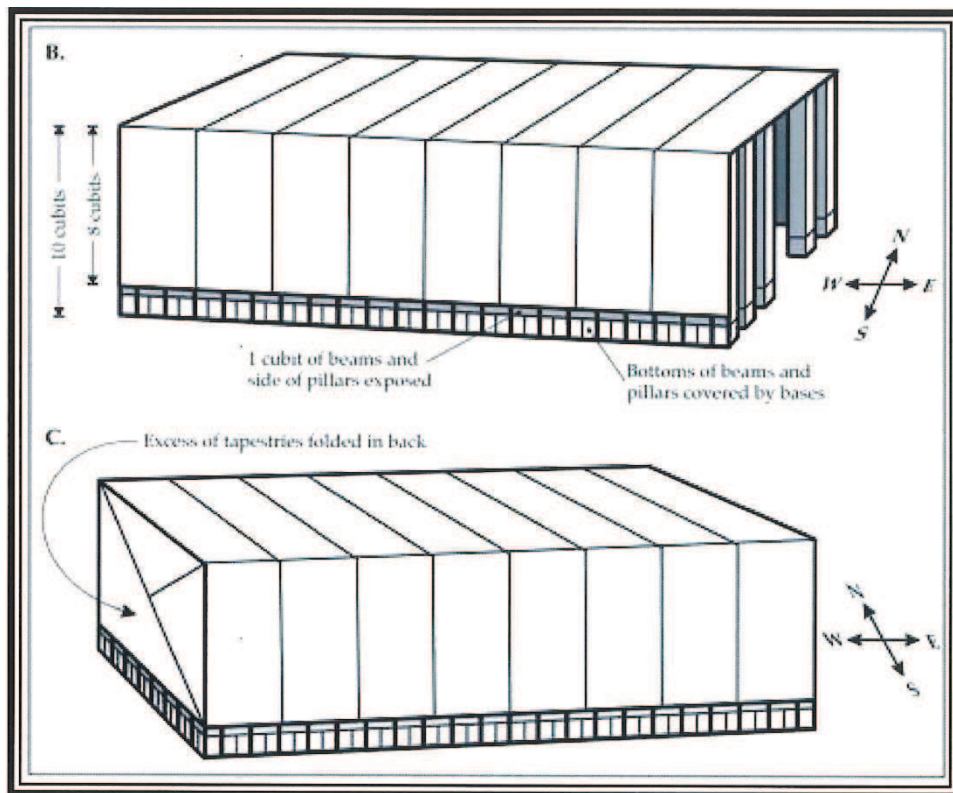
*“According to a widely held scholarly view, keresh indicates a wooden frame rather than a plank; this is based on the fact that the massive weight of forty-eight or fifty planks of wood required for the Tabernacle, would have imposed an intolerable burden on those charged with transporting them in the wilderness.” (Sarna, p. 169)*

Advocates of “*kerashim*” as open frames also point out that solid plank walls would have concealed the majority of the exquisite tapestry which had been designed at great effort and cost to adorn the sanctuary. In this scenario, the tapestry would only have been visible on the ceiling. To avoid this dilemma some defenders of the traditional view have argued that the tapestry, unlike the other coverings, hung inside the walls. 19<sup>th</sup> Century German scholar C.W.F. Bahr presented the argument in this way:

*“This cloth of tapestry was regarded as par excellence, the tabernacle or habitation of God, that name being applied to it specifically and that it is therefore improbable that it would be allowed to hang concealed between the*

*frame and the over-curtain; that this tapestry was exceedingly precious both by reason of its material and the labor and skill bestowed upon it, so that it would be an incredible waste to hang it where only one fourth part of it would fulfill the purpose for which such ornamentation is designed; that the figures of such cherubim as covered this tapestry were such as later covered the interior walls of the temple; and finally that there is no satisfactory way in which the drapery could be held in place if it hung on the outside, while it might easily be suspended from hooks within.” (Atwater, p. 21)*

This suggestion, however, is clearly inconsistent with the language of the text. The explanation of the extra length specified for the canvas cover to extend beyond and cover the Tabernacle tapestry beneath it (26:13) clearly indicate that the tapestry was outside the wooden structure. Overall, the open ladder-like frame understanding of the “*kerashi*” would appear to be most probable and more consistent with the nature of the Tabernacle as a tent.



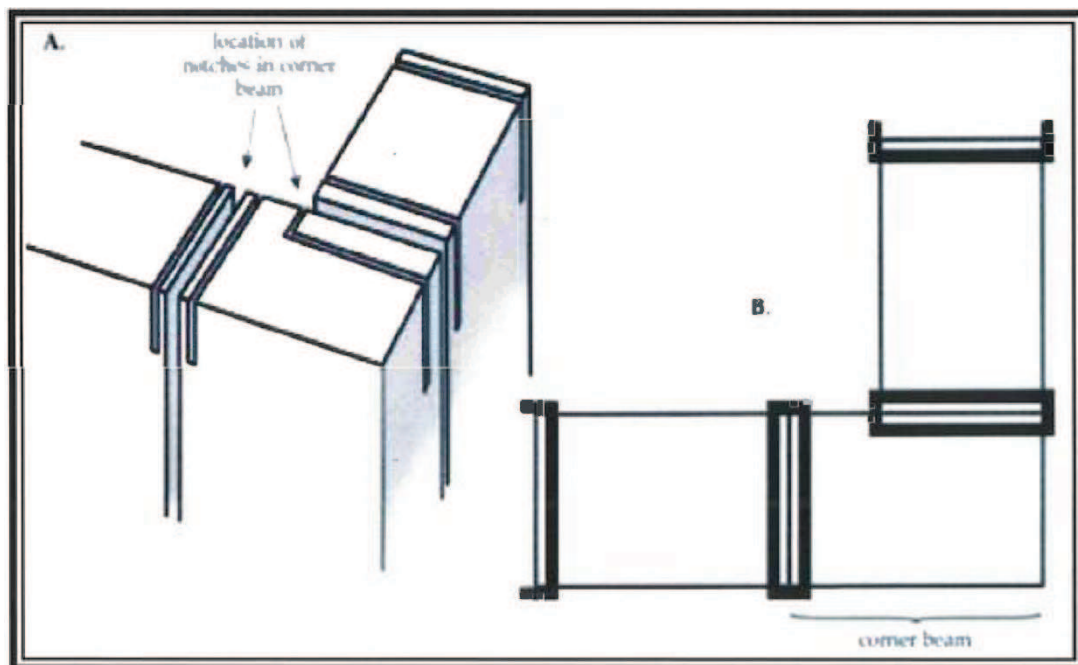
*Diagram of the Arrangement of the Tapestry Cover*

**“With two projections set parallel to each other.”** - The Hebrew phrase reads – *“Two arms for the one keresh, pegged each woman to her sister.”* **“Two projections”** in the NIV renders the Hebrew *“two arms.”* This translation applies the term to the tenons (*“a projection on the end or the side of a piece of wood made to fit into a corresponding cavity (mortise) in another piece”*) at the base of each frame which connect them to the silver bases in which they were to stand. **“Set parallel”** translates the Hebrew *“pegged each woman to her sister”* using the same idiom which had described the connection of the fabric

sections. Again, the language describes a bond which securely joins two as one. The specific meaning of the verb “set” (“pegged”) in this phrase suggest an alternate to the traditional understanding. The Hebrew verb is derived from a noun which means “the rungs on a ladder.” In this context, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Hebrew scholar A.R. Kennedy suggested that the “two arms” are not the tenons at the base of the frame, as they have been generally understood, but the two sides of the frame itself. Kennedy proposed the translation “two arms for each frame joined with cross bars.” Contemporary commentator William Propp concludes that this translation matches the language of the Hebrew text perfectly and resolves a significant number of questions about the structure of the Tabernacle:

*“All of these objections are answered, along with the weight problem noted above, by Kennedy’s (1898) exegesis, which has gained wide acceptance. The two connected arms, which Kennedy takes in the sense of ‘sides,’ in fact constitute the keres. That is, Verse 17 describes not a feature of the keres but the keres itself. The basic structure is two vertical shafts, each inserted into a silver structure for stability and preservation. These ‘arms’ are connected with horizontal rungs, so that each keres is essentially a trellis. Kennedy may err in computing the keres’s thickness (Kennedy argued that each frame was nine inches (½ cubit) thick) but otherwise, his model answers all objections. (Propp, p. 412)*

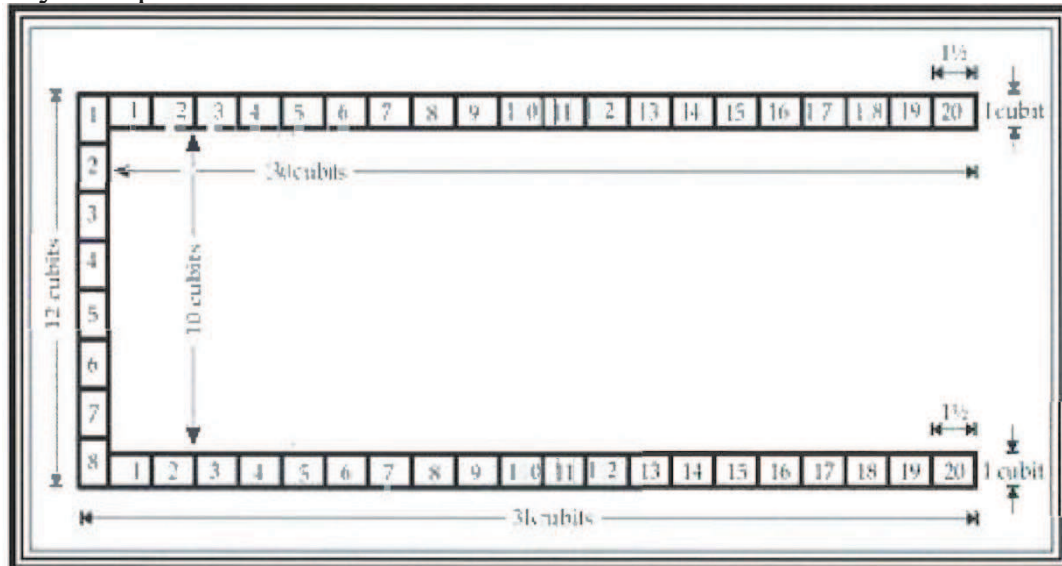
Similar structures have been discovered in Egypt, as, for example, in the gold plated tent frame of a magnificent pavilion in the tomb of the Queen Mother of Pharaoh Cheops.



*Diagram of the Traditional Rabbinic View of the Tabernacle Corners*

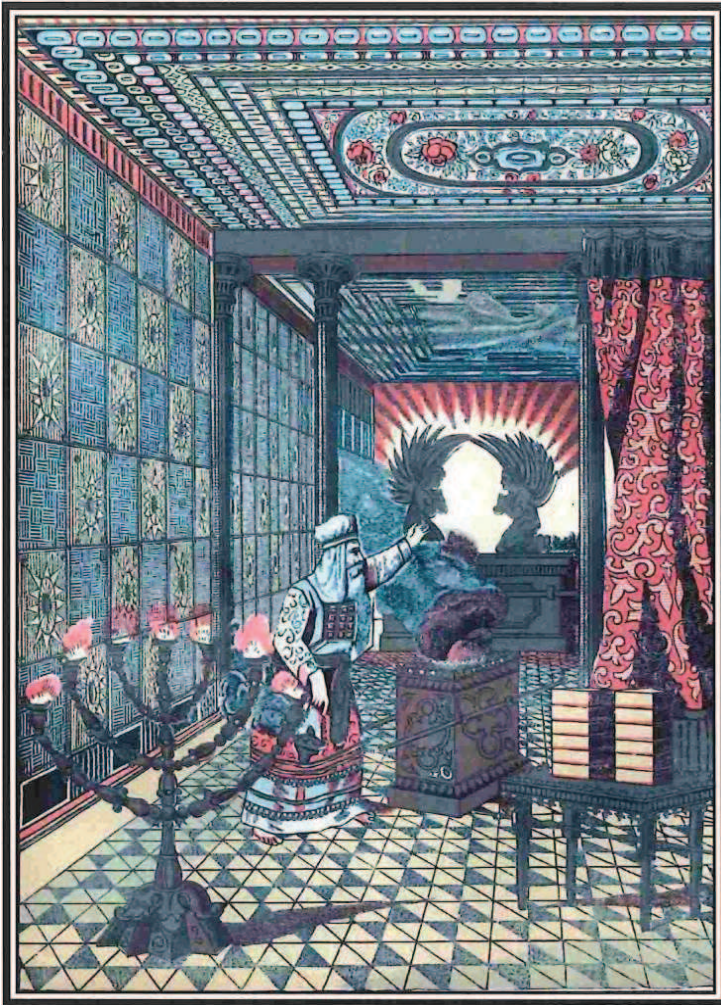
**“And make forty silver bases to go under them, two bases for each frame, one under each projection.”** - Twenty “kereshim” made up both the north and south walls of the sanctuary.

Eight more frames formed the west wall. Each section stood in two large silver bases. The Hebrew term for these bases literally means “*socket*.” The text explains that one of the frames two “*arms*” was inserted into each of the sockets. A “*talent*” of silver was used to cast each of the bases (Exodus 38:27). This meant that each silver base weighed slightly over seventy-five pounds.



*Diagram of the Traditional Rabbinic View of the Tabernacle Dimensions*

"And make two frames for the corners at the far end." - The walls were joined at the north and southwest corners by specially constructed corner pieces. They are described in this way: "At these two corners; they must be double all the way from the bottom to the top, and fitted into a single ring; both shall be like that." The sense of the text is obscure. A broad variety of different designs have been suggested none of which completely correspond to the terminology of the verse. Our two Jewish commentators, Nahum Sama and Umberto Cassutto accurately conclude: "This verse has not been satisfactorily interpreted." (Sama, p. 170): "These two boards were certainly intended to buttress the corners, but verse 24 is very obscure, and has been subjected to various far-fetched interpretations." (Cassutto, p. 356) Rabbinic tradition indicated that all of the "kereshim" were joined at the top by gold rings inserted into notches carved into the wood. This supposition was both necessitated and facilitated by the traditional assumption that the solid wood planks were eighteen inches thick. This, the rabbis concluded, was the meaning of the enigmatic reference to the "single ring" into which the corner pieces were to be fitted. "They must be double all the way from the bottom to the top" was understood as a reference to the overlap of the corner panel with its counterpart in the west wall. This design, in conjunction with the assumption that the planks were eighteen inches thick, also conformed to the traditional view that the width of the Tabernacle was 10 cubits, as the result of the overlap of the side walls against the back wall. This highlights one of the reasons why the corner designs are so important to scholars. They determine the dimensions of the Tabernacle's interior. Contemporary scholars tend to view the corners as braces outside of the juncture of the two walls (which reduces the interior width to 13.5 feet) or an additional frame on both ends of the back wall which would be permanently attached to the adjacent



*19<sup>th</sup> Century German Bible Engraving of the High Priest Within the Tabernacle*

wall, thus forming a stable corner (which extends the interior width to 18 feet). Cassutto refined the latter theory to reflect the specific terminology of the text. He argued that the corner panels on the west wall were permanently joined to their counterparts on the side walls with tenons and mortise. The entire length of the seam was then reinforced with a golden fillet (a strip of wood or metal used to seal and strengthen a joint) which was extended around the top of both pieces to bind them together (*“fitted into a single ring”*). This method of reinforcing structural joints was used among the ancient Egyptians. He further deduced that since these panels are not mentioned along with the other six, but specified separately, they were not the same size, most probably smaller than the others, in order to minimize the weight of the joined pieces. He suggested a half cubit (9 inches) as their width which would preserve the traditional interior width of the Tabernacle at ten cubits. Cassutto

concluded his argument with the observation that the narrower corner segments of the west wall would nonetheless have two silver bases in order to further enhance their stability and conform to the detail of the text: *“So there will be eight frames and sixteen silver bases, two under each frame.”* These bases would have had to have been narrower than their counterparts but would then have been longer, extending out at the corners.

*“Also make crossbars of acacia wood ...”* - The entire structure was further strengthened by the installation of crossbars which held all of the panels together. The Hebrew term used here is typically applied to the sturdy beam used to secure doors and gates. These bars were evidently quite sturdy and not merely decorative. The north and south walls have five poles running their entire length attached to the walls by an unspecified number of golden *“rings.”* The Hebrew more generally describes a housing or bracket which could have been significantly more substantial than simple golden rings. Most commentators conclude that the crossbars were not continuous, fashioned from a single piece of wood, since forty - five foot lengths of acacia wood would have been virtually impossible to obtain. The text does not indicate whether the crossbars were mounted on the inside or the outside of the frames. Special attention is given to the west wall and its center crossbar – *“Five for the frames at*

*the west on the far end of the Tabernacle. The center crossbar is to extend from end to end at the middle of the Tabernacle.*” The particular reference to the center bar on the west wall suggests that it was somehow unique. Perhaps, on the west wall, the center bar was not only held in place by golden brackets like its counterparts but extended slightly beyond the panels of the west wall into sockets in the north and south walls which would have further strengthened the comers of the structure.

### **Verse 30**

*Set up the Tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain.*

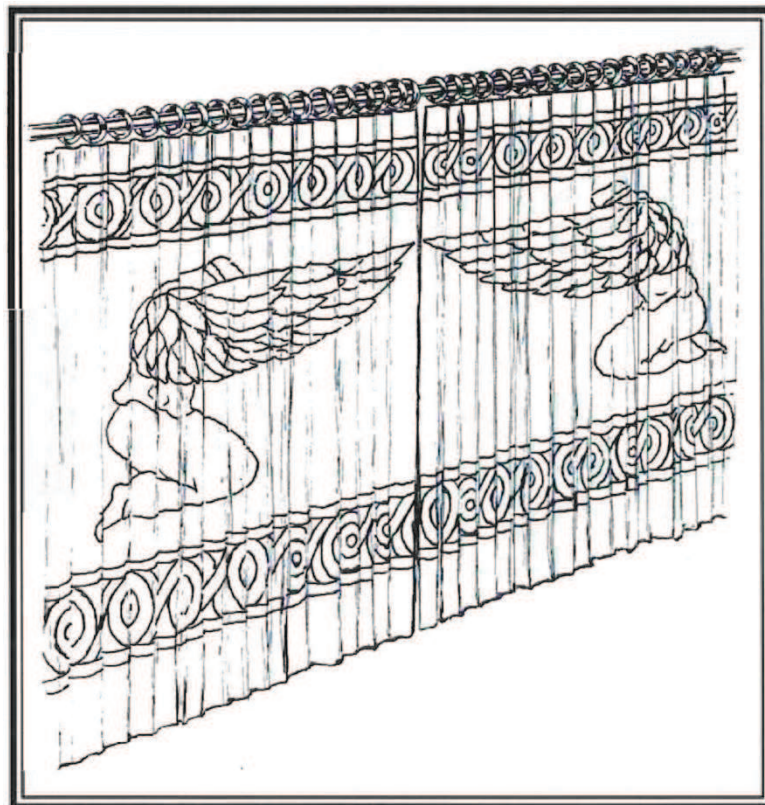
*“Set up the Tabernacle .”* - Once again Moses is reminded visible Tabernacle which the Lord had displayed before him upon Mount Sinai. The descriptions and specifications presented in these texts are merely summaries of that which Moses has already seen. They may be maddeningly vague to us - who have not been given that vision - but for Moses they were merely reminders of the precisely detailed structure God had previously revealed. If the texts were all the information Moses and his builders had to go on, a great deal of the Tabernacle design would have been left to human improvisation. But that was not the case. This sanctuary had been designed by God Himself and would be built to His exact specification based upon the Tabernacle which Moses had studied upon the mountain. That fundamental truth is repeated emphasized throughout the text: *Make this Tabernacle and its furnishing exactly like the pattern I will show you ... See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.*” (Exodus 25:9, 4); *“It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain.”* (Exodus 27:8); *“They are to make them just as I commanded you.”* (Exodus 31:11); *“So all the work on the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord commanded Moses ... the Israelites had done all the work just as the Lord had commanded Moses. Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the Lord had commanded.”* (Exodus 39:32,42); *“The Lampstand was made exactly like the pattern the Lord had shown Moses.”* (Numbers 8:4)

### **Verses 31-33**

*Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine twisted linen, with cherubim worked into it by a skilled craftsmen. Hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases. Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the Ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.*

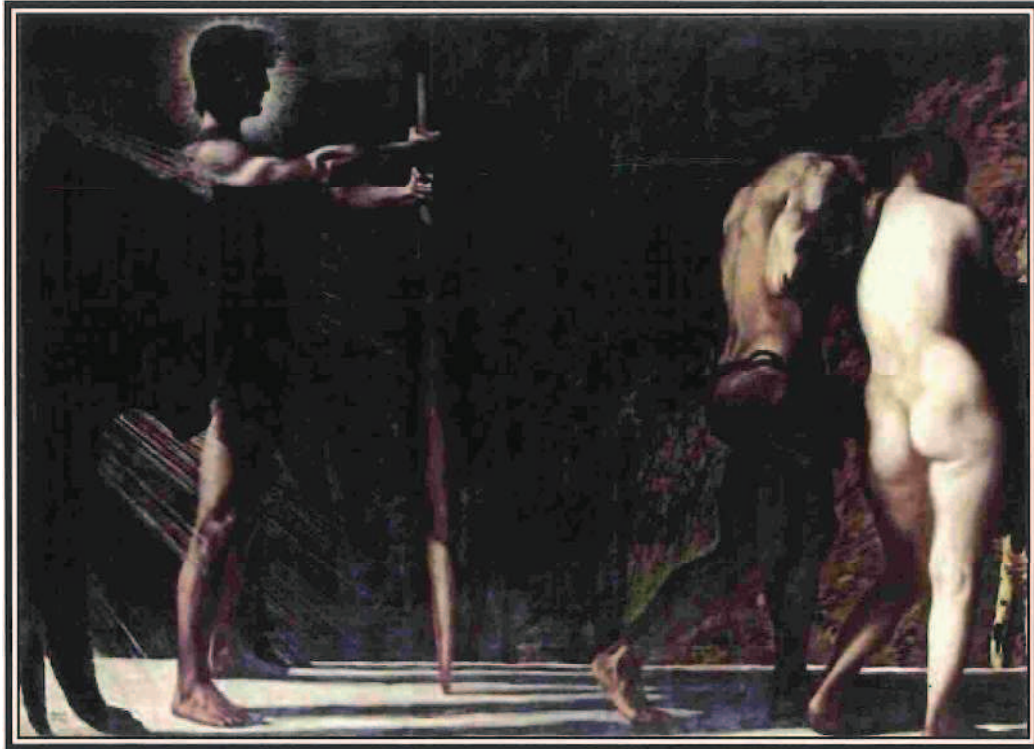
*“Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet ...”* - The interior of the Tabernacle was divided into two sections by a dividing curtain. The Hebrew noun is *“paroket.”* It is derived from a Mesopotamian root which mean *“to conceal”* or *“to obstruct.”* In this context the word describes the function of the inner curtain as a veil to conceal the Most Holy Place and the Ark it contains, thereby expressing the unapproachable holiness of God. Each of

its various designations stresses this function from different perspectives. It is subsequently identified as ***“the shielding curtain”*** (Exodus 39:34; Numbers 4:5) because it shielding the sacred Ark from the gaze of the priests carrying out their duties in the Holy Place. The inner veil is also called ***“the curtain of the testimony in the Tent of Meeting”*** (Leviticus 4:3) This designation alludes to the role of the Ark as the receptacle of the tablets of the Ten Commandments – ***“the Ark of the Testimony”*** (Exodus 25:22; 26:33) which are frequently called ***“the two tablets of the Testimony”*** (Exodus 31:18; 32:15; 34:29). The ark defined the Tabernacle as the dwelling place of the Lord. This curtain's primary function was to establish the limit of the sacred space around the ark as the throne room of God. ***“This curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.”*** Leviticus 4:6 labels it as ***“the curtain of the shrine”*** as the innermost boundary of the Holy Place. Solomon replaced this veil with solid doors in his Temple, but the massive temple curtains of the second Temple restored this vital feature of the Tabernacle. Furthermore it set the stage for the dramatic, theological profound, rending of the temple curtain at the moment of the Messiah’s death upon the cross (Mark 15:38). Christ, our great High Priest, made the atoning sacrifice once for all, and the curtain which for centuries had signified the separation of the guilty sinner from the holiness of God was ripped apart. The separation was over! God had restored the perfect harmony which had reigned before Adam’s fall into sin by the death of His own Son. ***“When Christ came as high priest ... He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.”*** (Hebrews 9:11 - 12) The barrier of the inner curtain has been removed for every believer:



***“The Inner Veil of the Tabernacle”***





*“The Cherub Guardian at Eden’s Gate” by Franz von Stuck*

*“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body ... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith:”* (Hebrews 10:19 - 20) The inner curtain was to be fashioned of the same precious materials from which the Tabernacle covering were made – *“blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine twisted linen”* - and to be adorned with the same magnificent cherubim – *“with cherubim worked into it by a skilled craftsman”* - the throne angels which signified the presence of God. As in previous descriptions of the Tabernacle curtains, no information is provided as to the appearance of the cherubim or the manner in which they were incorporated into the hangings of the Tabernacle. The Talmud teaches that the cherubim were lions on one side and eagles on the other. Be that as it may, what is clear, however, is that these glorious angels were to be the predominant theme of the sanctuary. It would be most appropriate that the dividing curtain which guarded the sanctity of the Most Holy Place was to be adorned with the figure of the same angels whom God had placed at the entrance to Eden to bar sinful man’s way back to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:24). The unique significance of the cherubim upon this barrier is further indicated by the fact that these angels were not placed upon the entrance curtain at the front of the Tabernacle. This curtain was not designed to facilitate access but to bar the way. It did not part in the middle, but consisted of one single piece as a deliberate barrier between the two sections of the Tabernacle. The only time when anyone passed beyond the barrier was on the Day of Atonement when the High Priest went into the Most Holy Place to sprinkle the blood upon the Mercy Seat. To gain access, it would have been necessary for him to move one of the side posts which held the curtain, an awkward and difficult maneuver at best. But this too was part of the symbolism of the shielding curtain and the grim message it conveyed. All of this serves to

make the miracle of the rending curtain of Good Friday all the more magnificent.



*“The Curtain of the Testimony in the Tabernacle”*

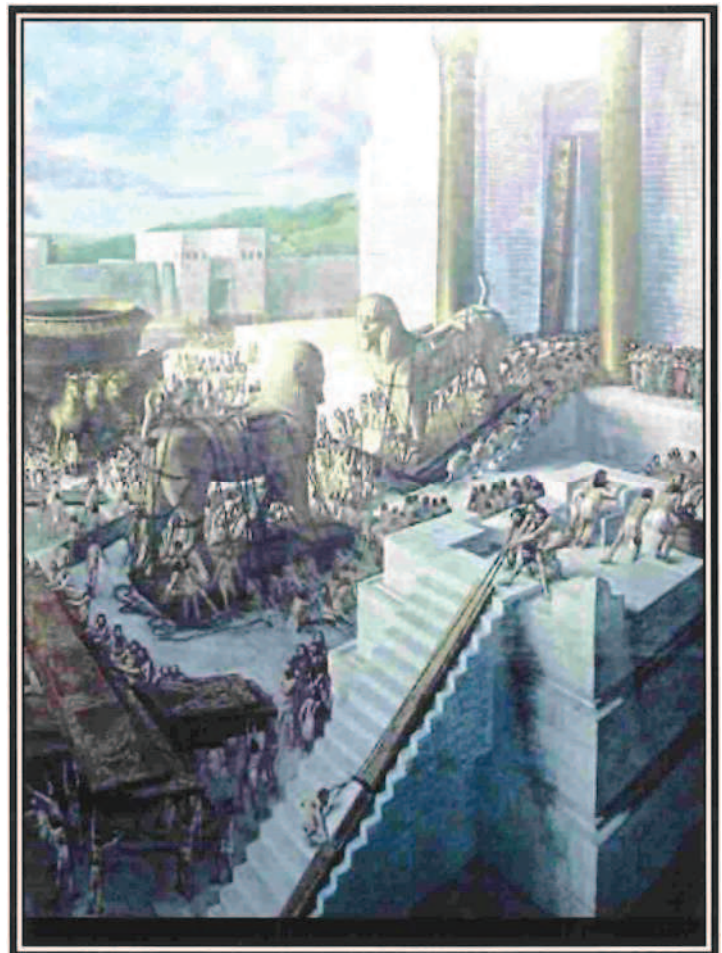
**“Hang it with gold hooks on four post of acacia wood overlaid with gold ...”** - Four acacia wood posts, covered with gold, supported the inner curtain. No information is provided as to either the diameter or the height of the four posts from which the curtain as to be suspended. The general assumption has been that the posts were ten cubits (fifteen feet) tall to raise the curtain to the ceiling of the Tabernacle. Those who believe the Tabernacle had a flat roof assume the columns were all the same height, while those who believe it had a pitched roof often extend the two center columns beyond the top of the curtain to support that roof. In any case, the weight of a 15’ x 15’ woven curtain (according to the Talmud the curtain was a hands breadth thick) would have been substantial and the posts would had to have been of sufficient magnitude to support that weight. Rabbinic tradition teaches that the columns were ten cubits tall, one cubit wide, and 3/4 cubit wide and that the silver bases in which they stood matched the bases of the wall panels, one cubit wide and tall and 3/4 cubit deep, each fashioned from a talent of silver (75 pounds) – **“standing on four silver bases.”** Nor is the spacing of the posts across the width of the Tabernacle defined. If we assume that the two outer columns were against the north and south walls, the space between the columns would have been slightly around 4 feet, allowing for the width of the columns themselves. The Hebrew text describes a “Y” shaped bracket at the top of each column. Both the Talmud and most contemporary scholars assume that the curtain was suspended from a gold plated acacia wood pole which was designed to fit into these brackets and matched the width of the sanctuary (10 cubits - 15 feet). The text makes no

mention of such a curtain rod although it would have greatly facilitated the placement of the curtain. The NIV inaccurately describes the installation of the curtain in its translation of Verse 33 – **“Hang the curtain from the clasps.”** The Hebrew actually says – *“Hang the curtain beneath the clasps”* - thereby indicating that the curtain and its posts were to be placed directly below the gold clasps which linked the two halves of the innermost Tabernacle cover. This would locate the inner curtain ten cubits into the sanctuary. The Most Holy Place as is thus a perfect cube ten by ten by ten cubits. The Holy Place would be the same height and width by twice as long - 20 cubits. If the curtain were to have been hung from the golden clasps in the ceiling it would have added significant stress to the structure and probably caused the ceiling to sag in at that point.

### ***Verses 34-35***

***Put the Atonement Cover on the Ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place. Place the table outside the curtain on the north side of the Tabernacle and put the lampstand opposite it on the south side.***

***“Place the Atonement Cover...”*** - The nature of the inner curtain as the barrier between the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place was further emphasized by its position relative to the distinctive furnishings of each chamber. This approach implicitly serves to remind the reader of the difference in function between the Most Holy Place as the dwelling of God upon the Ark and the Holy Place as the location of the priestly worship of God. These three furnishings, ***“the Atonement Cover of the Ark of the Testimony”*** (Exodus 25:10 - 22), ***“the table”*** (Exodus 25:23 - 30), and ***“the lampstand”*** (Exodus 25:31 - 40) had already been described along with their positions in the two chambers. The sequence here is not intended to detail the chronology of their actual installation, as Exodus 40:3 indicates that the Ark was to be put in place first and the curtain thereafter. ***“Place the Ark of the Testimony in it and shield the Ark with the curtain.”***



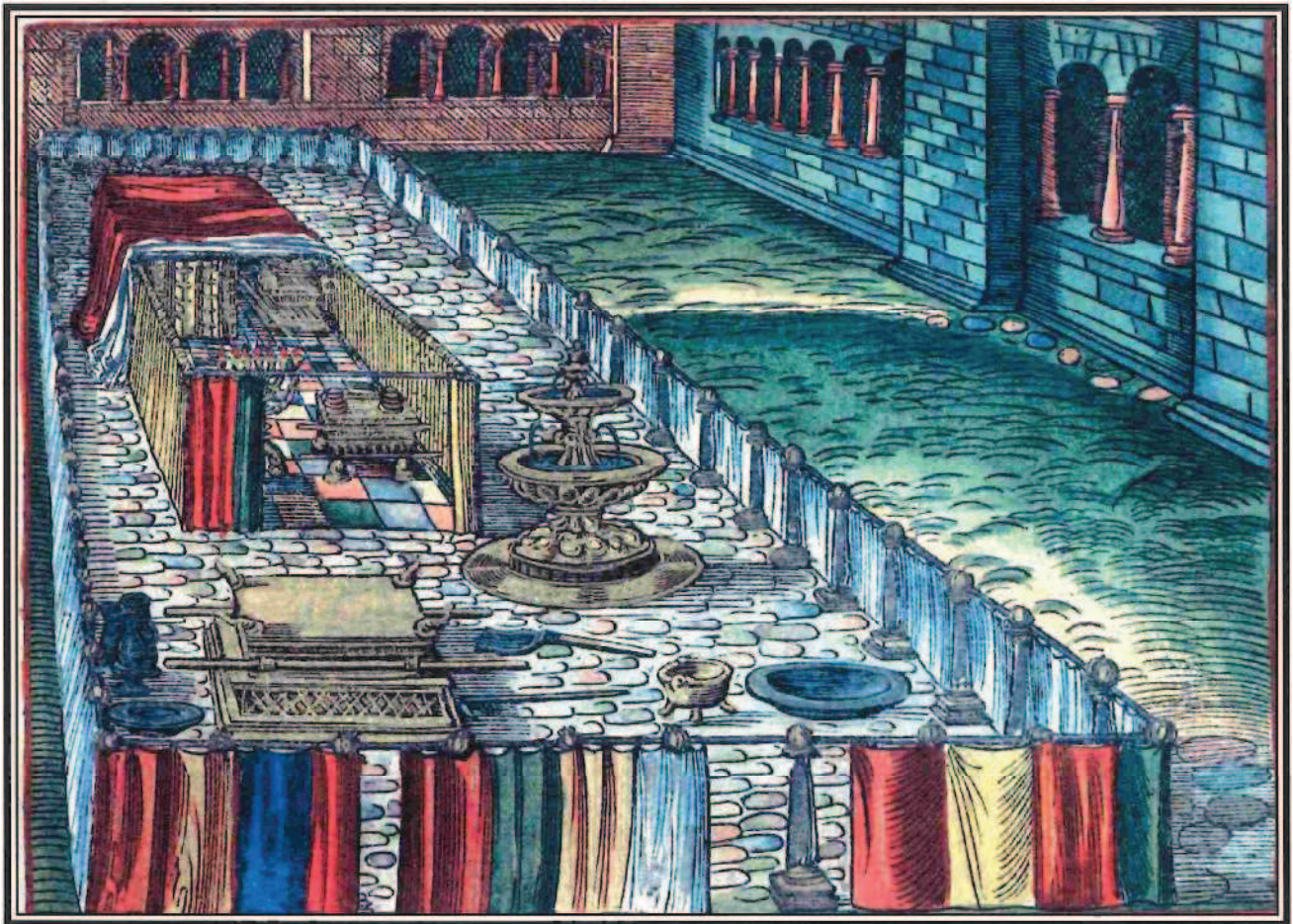
***“The Installation of the Grand Cherubim In The Temple of Solomon”***

### ***Verses 36-37***

***For the entrance to the tent, make a***

*curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen - the work of an embroiderer. Make gold hooks for this curtain and five posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and cast five bronze bases for them.*

**“For the entrance to the tent make a curtain...”** - The Tabernacle opened toward the east, the direction of the rising sun. This would also be the case with the first and second temples in Jerusalem. The Hebrew terms for east and west reflect the orientation of the land of Canaan. East means – *“toward the desert”* - a reference to the Negev Desert to the southeast of the land and west mean – *“toward the sea”* - a reference to the Mediterranean Sea which formed the western boundary of the Promised Land. The entrance curtain is clearly distinguished from the veil between the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place. The Hebrew text uses a different noun to identify it. The term for the inner veil was *“paroket”* drawn from verbs that describe the action of shielding or protecting a sacred object or shrine, namely the Ark and the area in which it rested. The entrance curtain is identified with the more ordinary word *“masakh”* which simply means *“to cover.”* This word was used more generally to refer to the curtains which protected a tent or dwelling from the harsh light of the sun. Some English translations note the distinction by identifying the former as the *“Veil”* and the latter as the *“Screen.”* While the entrance curtain was to be fashioned of the same fine materials from which the veil was made – ***“make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen”*** - the cherubim which prominently adorned the veil and the other interior hangings of the Tabernacle are not mentioned in its specifications. The Hebrew term which identified the weaving of the curtain also changes, in this instance referring to *“another type of specialized weaving, which required less skill than that required for the coverings of the Tabernacle and parokhet.”* (Sarna, p. 171) The number of support pillars also differs, five for the screen in contrast to four for the veil, but this difference most probably reflects nothing more than the practical reality that the screen would be moved repeatedly throughout the day while the veil was very rarely shifted. In both cases, the pillars are to be made from acacia wood and overlaid with gold. Once again the dimensions of the posts and their specific placement across the space is not indicated. As in the previous instance, the general assumption is that the screen was suspended from a curtain rod mounted at the top of the posts. The bases for the screen’s posts are cast of bronze while the bases of the veil’s post were cast from silver. The bronze bases identified the screen as a component of the court rather than the Tabernacle itself. All this reflects the same gradation in cost and quality which has been evident throughout the Tabernacle's design. The Ark within the Most Holy Place was the heart of the Tabernacle, the dwelling place of God. The closer one drew to the Ark the more costly and ornate the materials and methods of construction became. In this deliberate fashion the Tabernacle reflected the glory of the Lord and celebrated the wonder of His presence in the midst of His people. Josephus suggests that the priests fell to the ground and crawled under the screen to enter the Holy Place. Most scholars conclude that this is a characteristic exaggeration and that the screen either parted in the middle or was drawn aside to provide access.



*“The Tabernacle and Its Court” – 16<sup>th</sup> Century Luther Bible Illustration by Lucas Cranach*

## *Exodus Chapter 27*

*(1) Build an altar of acacia wood three cubits high, it is to be square, five cubits long and five cubits wide. (2) Make a horn at the four corners so that each of the horns are of one piece, and overlay the altar with bronze. (3) Make all its utensils with bronze - it pots to remove the ashes, and its shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks and fire pans. (4) Make a grating for it, a bronze network, and make a bronze ring at each of the four corners of the network. (5) Put it under the ledge of the altar so that it is half way up the altar. (6) Make poles of acacia wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze. (7) The poles are to be inserted into the rings so that they will be on two sides of the altar when it is carried. (8) Make the altar hollow, out of boards. It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain. (9) Make a courtyard for the Tabernacle. The south side shall be a hundred cubits long and is to have curtains of finely twisted linen, (10) with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases, and with silver hooks and bands on the posts. (11) The north side shall also be a hundred cubits long, and is to have curtains with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases, and with silver hooks and bands on the posts. (12) The west end of the courtyard shall be fifty cubits wide and have curtains, with ten posts and ten bases. (13) On the east end, toward the sunrise, the courtyard shall also be fifty cubits wide. (14) Curtains fifteen cubits long are to be on one side of the entrance, with three posts and*

*three bases, (15) and curtains fifteen cubits long are to be on the other side, with three posts and three bases. (16) For the entrance to the courtyard, provide a curtain twenty cubits long, of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen - the work of an embroiderer - with four posts and four bases. (17) All the posts around the courtyard are to have silver bands and hooks, and bronze bases. (18) The courtyard shall be a hundred cubits long and fifty cubits wide, with curtains of finely twisted linen five cubits high, and with bronze bases. (19) All the other articles used in the service of the Tabernacle, whatever their function, are to be of bronze. (20) Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning (21) in the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain that is in front of the Testimony, Aaron and his sons are to keep the lamps burning before the Lord from evening til morning. This is to be a lasting ordinance among the Israelites for the generations to come.*

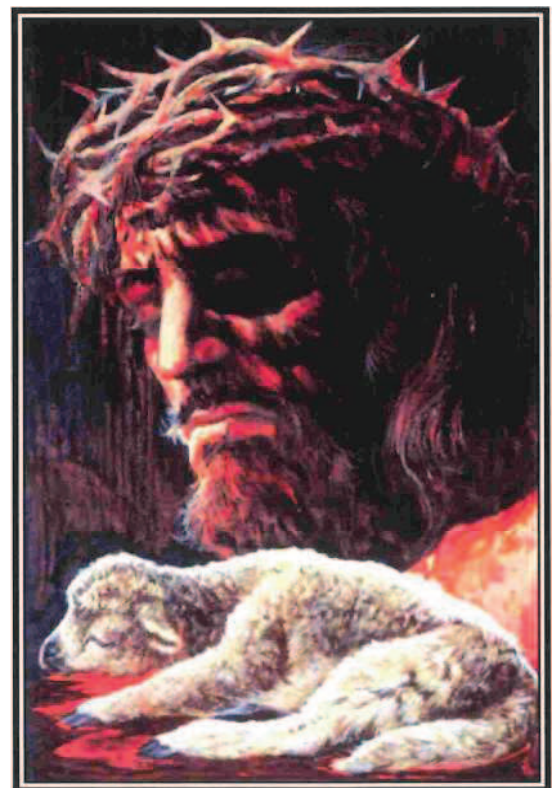
### ***Verses 1-8***

*Build an altar of acacia wood, three cubits high; it is to be square, five cubits long and five cubits high. Make a horn at each of the four corners so that the horns and the altar are of one piece, and overlay the altar with bronze. Make all the utensils of bronze – its pots to remove the ashes, and its shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks and fire pans. Make a grating for it, a bronze network, and make a bronze ring at each of the four corners of the network. Put it under the ledge of the altar so that it is half way up the altar. Make poles of acacia wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze. The poles are to be inserted into the rings so that they will be on two sides of the altar, when it is to be carried. Make the altar hollow, out of boards. It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain.*

*“Build an altar of acacia wood ...”* - An elaborate system of sacrifices and offerings was the core of the worship of ancient Israel. The purpose of all of these sacrifices was to inculcate in the minds of the people the foundational reality of the plan of salvation – *“something that God considers a substitute must die in my place so that I may live.”* (Stuart, p. 594) With the fall into sin death became the inevitable fate of every descendant of Adam and Eve. Humankind was now sinful by nature and that inherent sinfulness was reflected in a self-destructive pattern of willful disobedience to the Word of God. Justice demanded death for the sinner. The righteous God could not ignore that which was just and right. In His mercy and love God determined to pay our death penalty Himself in the innocent suffering and death of His own Son. Jesus became the substitutionary sacrifice who submitted to our death in our place so that we might be restored to the life for which humanity had been created in the beginning. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was deliberately designed by God to display that crucial reality before mankind through the religion of Israel. David Chytraeus, one of the foremost theologians of the Lutheran Reformation, provided this cogent summary of the role of sacrifice in the faith of Israel:

*“The Levitical sacrifices were offerings of animals, foods, wine, produce, etc. commanded by God through Moses; they were constitute a training ground in obedience owed to God, and energizing force for the public ministry, and types representative of the future sacrifice of Christ and all spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ...The sacrificial system was the nerve and sinew of the priesthood of the Jewish church and the sinew of the public assemblies in which there occurred a general proclamation and transmittal to posterity of the true doctrine concerning God and His Son, our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ, who was to be offered as a victim for the entire human race...The sacrifices were principally representations or types of the sacrifices and benefits of Christ which are set forth in the New Testament. For the Levitical sacrifices did not merit the remission of sins, nor did they placate the wrath of God; they were merely signs to bring to mind the future sacrifice of Christ, which alone was the ransom price for the sins of the human race...’It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins,’ but Christ ’by one offering hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.’ (Hebrews 10:4, 14)...These pronouncements should be kept ever before our eyes as a profound interpretive commentary on all the Mosaic sacrifices whenever we read Leviticus, so that we may have no doubt that each and every sacrifice was a sermon on the sacrifice and benefits of Christ.” (Chytraeus, pp. 58-60)*

This being the case, it should come as no surprise that the predominant feature of the Tabernacle courtyard would be a large altar, and the accouterments necessary for the ongoing sacrifices which would be performed upon that altar. The Hebrew term for **“altar”** – *“Mizbeah”* – literally means *“a place of slaughter”* or in a religious context, *“a place of sacrifice.”* This altar will subsequently be identified more specifically as **“the altar of burnt offering”** (Hebrew – *“mizbah ha – holah”* – *“the altar of the holocaust offering”* Exodus 38:1) in contrast to the Altar of Incense, and **“the bronze altar”** (Exodus 38:30) in distinction to the golden incense altar. The rabbis spoke of the *“inner”* and *“outer”* altars in terminology which paralleled the two Tabernacle curtains.



**“The Sacrifice of Christ the Lamb of God”**

Fallen mankind had offered sacrifices since the beginning (Genesis 4:3 - 5) Both the patriarchs and Moses had offered sacrifices at God's command.

The indelible impression of the concept of sacrificial atonement on the religious consciousness of fallen humanity, no matter how twisted or distorted it always became apart from the Word of God, is evidenced here by the fact that the Hebrew text refers to *“the altar”* - although no altar had previously been mentioned in reference to the plans for the Tabernacle.

*“The altar on which the sacrifices were offered, occupied a central cultic position, and no shrine could possibly be without an altar. It was obvious that in the Israelite sanctuary, too, there would be an altar; hence, from the very beginning, the word is used with the definite article.”* (Cassutto, p. 362)

***“An altar of acacia wood three cubits high; it was square - five cubits long and five cubits wide.”*** - The design is simple and practical, combining the logistics of the actual sacrifices to be offered with fact that this altar also had to be portable. It was basically an open fire box, covered with a bronze grate upon which the sacrifices would be placed. Its dimensions (4.5 feet high, 7.5 feet wide and long) provided ample space for the sacrifice of large animals. Despite the detailed dimensions given in the text, widespread rabbinic tradition continues to assert that the bronze altar was 10 cubits high and included a long (30 cubit) ramp on its south side which enabled the priests to ascend to the fire at the top of the altar. *“Parshah Terumah”* a classic commentary on the Torah, offers this description of the elevated bronze altar:

*“You shall have the artisans make the outer altar out of panels of acacia wood, assembled into a hollow box, five cubits long and five cubits wide – the altar shall be square and ten cubits tall. It will be three cubits high above its*



*“The High Priest Standing Before the Bronze Altar and the Ramp”*



*border as will be described presently. You shall have them make protrusions for it on the top, at its for corners, the protrusions being of one piece with it. The protrusions will each be one cubit tall, one cubit long, and one cubit wide. The space between these protrusions, plus an additional cubit inward, will serve as space for the priests to walk on the top of the altar when they burn the offerings. This will leave one square cubit in the center of the altar's top for the woodpile....You shall have them make a grate of copper network to girdle the altar, one cubit wide, occupying the sixth cubit of the altar's height. You shall have them make on the network four copper rings, on the four corners of the grate. Have them make a decorative border around the altar, occupying the seventh cubit of the altar's height from the ground. You shall have them place the grate below the decorative border of the altar, extending downward to the middle of the height of the altar, that is, until the point five cubits from the ground. It will thus be clear where the midpoint of the altar's height is, and this will be necessary for there are certain offerings whose blood must be applied to the upper half of the altar and others whose blood must be applied to the lower half of the altar...You shall have them make the altar a hollow structure of panels, and fill it with earth every time it is set up. It will not be solid and it will not have a built in roof As He showed you on the Mountain, so shall they make it. In order to ascend the altar, have the artisans build a ramp, since it is forbidden to ascend the altar by stairs. This ramp will be positioned to the south of the altar.” (“Parshah”, p. 45-46)*

Rabbi Chaim Wiseman of the Temple Institute in Jerusalem has attempted to minimize the discrepancy between the tradition and the text by suggesting that the portable altar itself



*“The High Priest Before the Bronze Altar” by Larson*

was three cubits high but it was installed upon a 12 cubit stone base each time it was set up. That base was then covered with bronze panels to distinguish the altar from the stone ramp which led up to the altar.

Whatever its height may have been, four and a half feet or fifteen feet, given the previous command of Exodus 20:24-25 – ***“Make an altar of earth for Me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings, and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and cattle. Wherever I cause My Name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. If you make an altar of stones for Me, do not make it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it.”*** - the general assumption among Bible scholars is that the base of the firebox was filled with earth and/or field stones. This would also have served to protect the wooden planks covered with bronze from the heat of the fire. In this regard, the rabbis taught that the design of this altar was a deliberate test of faith for Israel. The ability of the altar to withstand the heat of the perpetual fires burning upon it without being consumed was a divine miracle intended to indicate God’s acceptance of the sacrifices which He had commanded upon that altar.

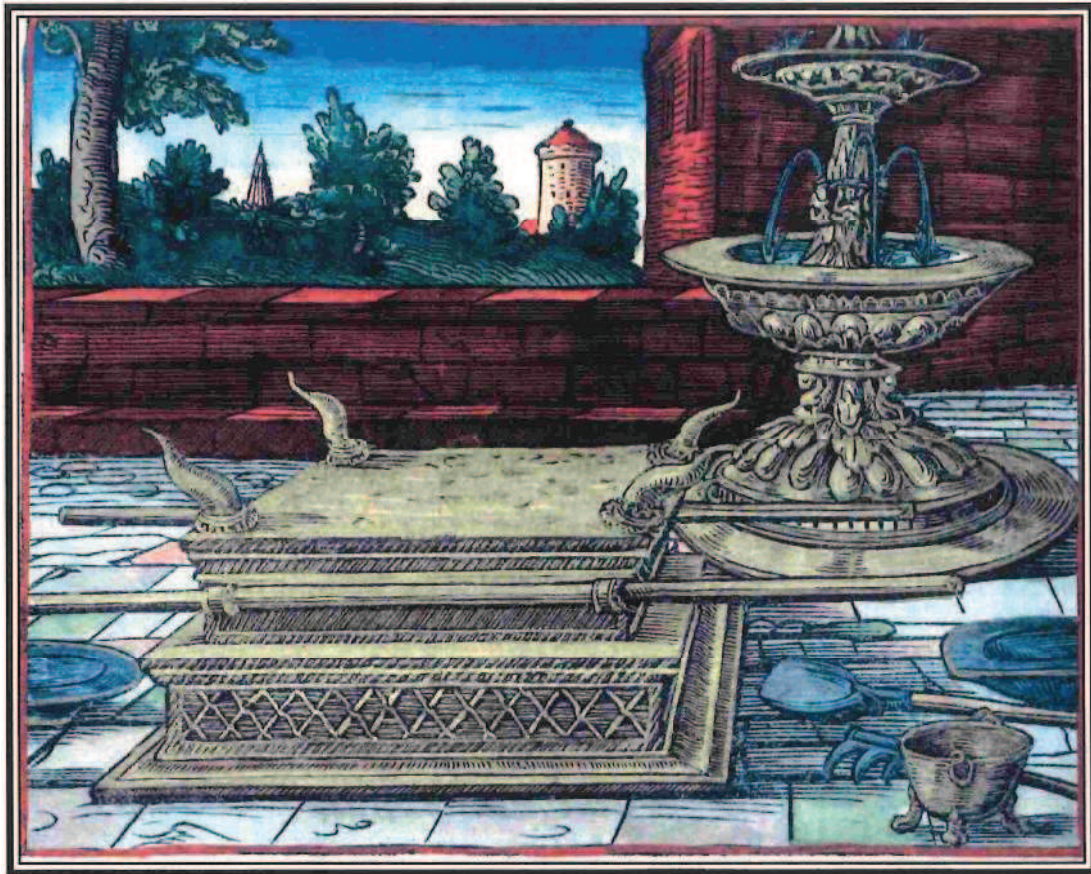
***“Make a horn at the four corners so that the horns and the altar are of one piece.”*** – The installation of horns upon the four corners of the altar reflect historic Middle Eastern practice. The ***“horn”*** is frequently used in Scripture as the emblem of strength and vitality, an image derived from the horns with which the great beasts destroyed their foes.

***“My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in Your deliverance ... He will give strength to His king and exalt the horn of His anointed.”*** (1 Samuel 2:1, 10)

***“To the arrogant I say, ‘Boast no more,’ and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up your horns. Do not lift up your horns against heaven; do not speak with outstretched neck ... As for me, I will declare this forever. I will sing praise to the God of Jacob. I will cut off the horns of all the wicked, but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up.”*** (Psalm 75:4, 10)

***“For You are their glory and their strength, and by Your favor You exalt our horn. Indeed, our shield belongs to the Lord, our King to the Holy One of Israel ... My faithful love will be with him and through My Name his horn will be exalted.”*** (Psalm 89:17, 24)

***“For surely our enemies, O Lord, surely our enemies will perish; all evildoers will be scattered. You have exalted my horn like that of a wild ox; fine oils have been poured upon me. My eyes have seen the defeat of my adversaries; my ears have heard the rout of my wicked foes.”*** (Psalm 92:9 - 11)



*“The Brass Furnishings of the Tabernacle Courtyard - The Altar of Burnt Offering and Its Utensils and the Laver” Luther Bible Woodcut by Lucas Cranach*

The same imagery of the horn as a symbol of power is evident in the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and Revelation where beasts with a multiplicity of horns signify the kings of kingdoms of the world (i.e. Daniel 7 & 8; Revelation 12 & 13). Ezekiel depicted the rich and powerful of Israel as fat sheep that use their horns to drive away the weak: ***“I Myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep away with your horns, until you have driven them away. I will save My flock and they will no longer be plundered.”*** (Ezekiel 34:20 - 22) In his blessing of the tribes, Moses extolled the strength of the sons of Joseph with the same image: ***“In majesty he is like a first-born bull; his horns are the horns of a wild ox. With them he will gore the nations, even those at the ends of the earth. Such are the ten thousands of Ephraim; such are the ten thousands of Manasseh.”*** (Deuteronomy 33:17) God foretold the vindication of His people at the coming of the Messiah through the prophet Micah as a promise of iron horns and bronze hooves: ***“Rise and thresh, O Daughter of Zion, for I will give you horns of iron; I will give you hooves of bronze and you will break to pieces many nations.”*** (Micah 4:13) The lament of the Messiah in Psalm 22 described the conspiracy of His enemies ***“Many bulls surround me, strong bulls of Bashan encircle Me”*** and He appealed to the Lord: ***“Rescue Me from the mouths of the lions; save Me from the horns of the wild oxen.”*** (Psalm 22:12, 21) The prophet Zechariah observed a most dramatic illustration of horns as a symbol of the powerful nations which have oppressed Judah and the cutting off of those horns as a promise of their downfall.

*“Then I looked up, and there before me were four horns! I asked the angel who was speaking to me, ‘What are these?’ He answered me, ‘These are the horns that scattered Israel, Judah and Jerusalem.’ Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. I asked, ‘What are these coming to do?’ He answered, ‘These are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could raise his head, but the craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people.’” (Zechariah 1:18 - 20)*



*Zechariah's Vision of the Four Horns by Ted Larson*

In a similar fashion Jeremiah lamented the downfall of Israel with the picture of a horn being cut off: ***“In His fierce anger He has cut off every horn of Israel. He has withdrawn His right hand at the approach of the enemy. He has burned Jacob like a flaming fire that consumes everything around it.”*** (Lamentations 2:3) It is clear that the horn as an apt symbol of power was well established in the consciousness of Israel throughout the Old Testament era.

In this context, the placement of horns upon the comers of the altars in the Tabernacle and later the Temple was a symbol of the power of God to whom the altars were dedicated and an assurance of his willingness to accept the sacrifices presented to him thereon. The Lord had established the sacrificial system and the Lord commanded the prominent placement of these horns upon the four comers of the altars. They became a visible expression of His

presence at the altar and of His power to fulfill the promises which He had given when He instituted the sacrifices to offered at that altar.

*“The origin and significance of the altar horns cannot be determined precisely. The extreme holiness with which they were endowed, certainly suggests that they were not merely decorative features, supports for the sacrificial vessels, or reproductions of the horns of the sacrificial animals. Clearly they express the numinous (a place of divine presence or power) character of the altar itself or of the deity worshiped there.”*  
(Ringern, TDOT, XIII, p. 172)

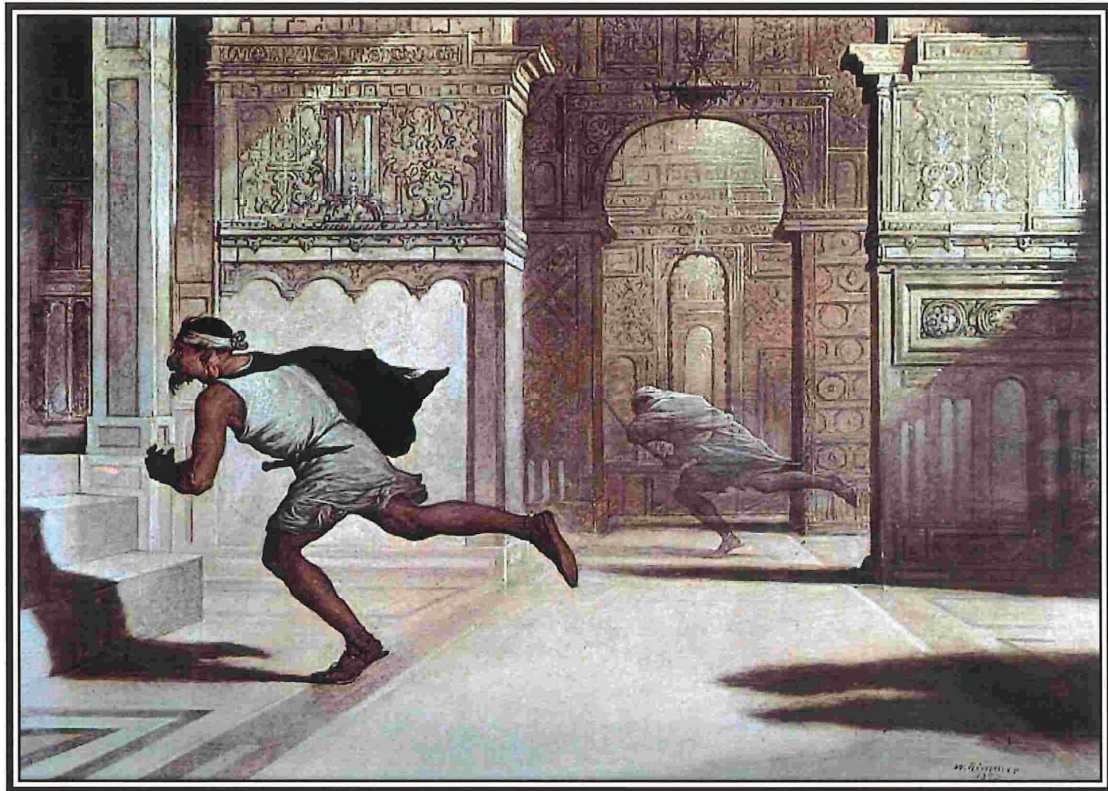
When the horns were torn from an altar that altar had been desecrated and destroyed. It could no longer function as a place of sacrifice. God warned apostate Israel: **“On the day I will punish Israel for her sins, I will destroy the altars of Bethel; the horns of the altar will be cut off and will fall to the ground.”** (Amos 3:14) In the worship of Israel the blood of the sacrifices was often placed directly upon the horns of the altar. This ritual action was intended to place the atoning blood directly before the deity to placate His righteous wrath. So, for example, when the Tabernacle and its priesthood were dedicated, Moses purified and consecrated the altar by smearing the blood upon its horns:

*“He then presented the bull for the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon its head. Moses slaughtered the bull and took some of its blood, and with his finger he put it on all the horns of the altar. So he consecrated it to make atonement for it.”* (Leviticus 8:14 - 15)

But Scripture is careful to stress that there is no sort of magical power inherent in an altar’s horns which can protect the impenitent or the hypocrite. Jeremiah scathing indictment of the spiritual corruption and idolatry declared: **“Judah’s sin is engraved with an iron tool, inscribed with a flint point on the tablets of their hearts and on the horns of their altars. Even their children remember their altars and their Asherah poles beside the spreading trees and on the high hills.”** (Jeremiah 17:1) As the blood of atonement directly confronted the Lord upon the horns of the altar, so the ugly reality of the peoples’ directly confronted the Lord as it was inscribed upon the horns of the altar.

The horns of the altar also became a place of refuge for the fugitive in the life of Israel. By clinging to the horns of the altar, a man, in effect, placed himself under the protection of God. In Exodus 21:12 - 14 the Lord decreed:

*“Anyone who strikes a man and kills him will surely be put to death. However, if he does not do it intentionally but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate. But if a man schemes to kill another man and does it deliberately, take him away from My altar and put him to death.”*



*“To the Horns of the Altar” by Harry Rimmer*

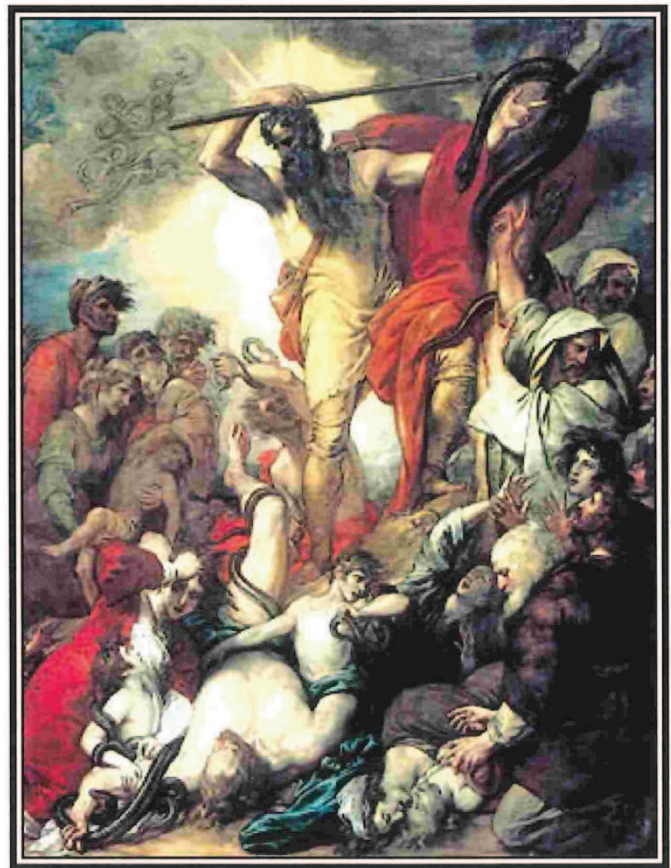
This practice saved the life of Adonijah, David’s son, who had attempted to supplant Solomon as the successor to the aged King David. When his effort failed, he fled to the horns of the altar and Solomon spared his life.

*“But Adonijah in fear of Solomon, went and took hold of the horns of the altar. Then Solomon was told, ‘Adonijah is afraid of King Solomon and is clinging to the horns of the altar. He says, ‘Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.’ Solomon replied, ‘If he shows himself to be a worthy man, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him, he will die.’ Then King Solomon sent men, and they brought him down from the altar. And Adonijah came and bowed down to King Solomon, and Solomon said, ‘Go to your home.’” (1 Kings 1:50 - 53)*

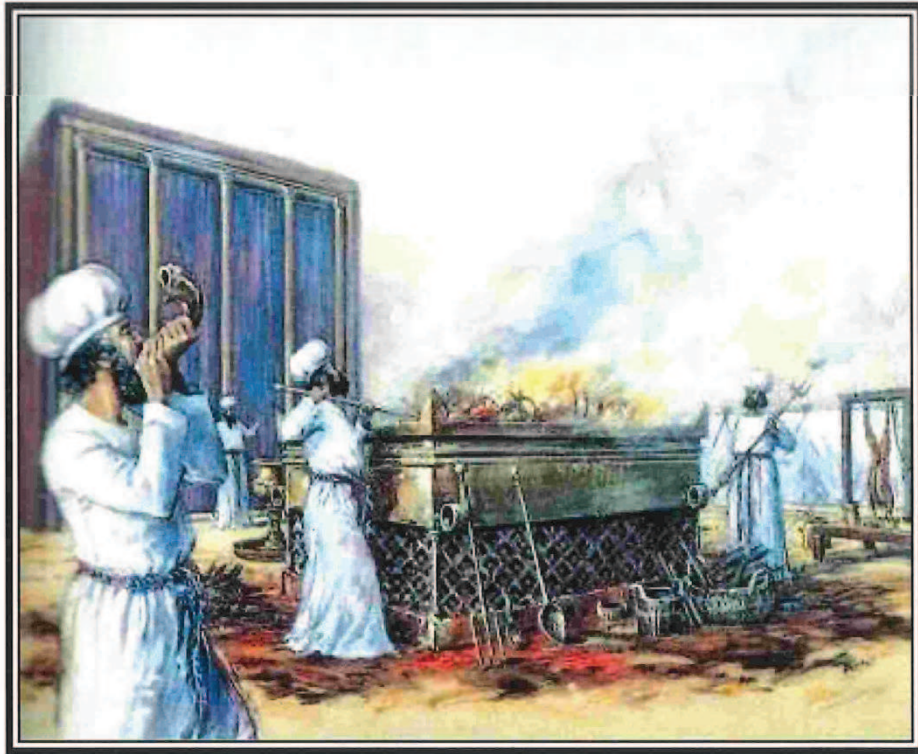
*“The horns and the altar are to be of one piece”* - This detail indicates that the horns are not to be detachable from the altar itself. These are an essential part of the structure and may not be removed. As noted above, if the horns of an altar were cut off, the altar could no longer serve the purpose for which it was designed. The same phrase had been used earlier in reference to the cherubim upon the Mercy Seat – *“make the cherubim of one piece with the cover at the two ends.”* (Exodus 25:16) It is interesting to note that the comers of an altar in the liturgical churches of Christendom are still referred to as *“horns”* based upon this historic phrase.

***“And overlay the altar with bronze”*** - Bronze is the characteristic metal of the courtyard and its furnishings. The progression from gold and silver within the sanctuary to bronze outside conveys the theological message of diminished sanctity as moves further away from the Ark within the Most Holy Place. This concept would be continued and enhanced in the first and second temples as different degrees of accessibility were established within the outer courts. Bronze is a combination of copper and tin. On a practical level bronze would serve as a more efficient protector of the wood it covered, both from rot and scorching. The courtyard and its furnishings were directly associated with God’s judgement upon sin and the blood sacrifices which indicated the necessity of paying the ***“wages of sin”*** (Romans 6:23) in death. All were fashioned from bronze - the clasps of the goat hair cover, the sockets of the entrance pillars, the pillars themselves, the pins and sockets of the barrier around the courtyard, the altar and its utensils along with the laver. Bronze appears once again in conjunction with judgement upon sin and the necessity of blood sacrifice to atone for that sin in the episode of the ***“brazen serpent”*** in Numbers 21. The people had murmured and complained against the Lord. In punishment poisonous snakes infested the camp and hosts died. Upon their repentance, the Lord instructed Moses to craft a ***“bronze serpent”*** and raise it up upon a wooden pole. Those who looked upon the serpent in faith were healed. The Gospel of John cites this incident as a prototype of the crucifixion of Christ: ***“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.”*** (John 3:14 - 15) The blood sacrifices upon the bronze altar and the bronze serpent in the wilderness both point forward to and find their fulfillment in the once for all sacrifice of the Son of God who shed His blood upon the cross.

***“Make all of its utensils of bronze, its pots to remove the ashes, and its shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks and fire pans.”*** - The slaughter and sacrifice of hundreds of animals was messy business. The tools needed to carry out this task were to be fashioned of the same bronze as the altar itself. ***“Its shovels”*** to remove the accumulation of ashes from the altar into the wide brimmed ***“pots to remove the ashes”*** in which they would be carried outside of the camp to the appointed place of disposal: ***“sprinkling bowls”*** (literally – ***“tossing vessels”***) designed to catch the blood which was used in the various rituals and sprinkled



***“The Brazen Serpent in the Wilderness”***  
by Benjamin West



*“The Brazen Altar and Its Implements”*

or poured out: *“meatforks”* to manipulate the carcasses of the animals upon the fire of the altar, and *“fire pans”* to maintain and arrange the perpetual flames which were to burn upon the altar. The listing is practical rather than theological. These are merely the tools needed to carry out the ongoing task of sacrifice.

*“Make a grating for it, a bronze network, and make a bronze ring at each of the four corners of the network. Put it under the ledge of the altar so that it is halfway up the altar.”* – *“The most obscure detail of the altar’s structure and function is the grate.”* (Durham, p. 376) The debate continues between those who understand this *“grating”* as a sort of grill inside the walls of the altar upon which the fire burned and the sacrifices were offered and those who understand the *“grating”* as an open mesh which constituted or surrounded the bottom half of the altar. If this were the case, the sacrificial fire would burn upon the stones within the altar box and the meshwork which held the stones would allow for up-draft of air which maintained the flames. Still others, attempt to have it both ways, asserting that the *“grating”* and the *“bronze network”* refer to two different features of the structure, the latter a grill for the sacrifices and the former a surrounding vent for the updraft. The altar was basically a large box open at both the bottom and the top. The proponents of a strong grill inside the altar’s walls insist that such an arrangement would provide the needed structural stability particularly when the altar was being moved.

*“It would appear that the altar itself was a hollow square without top or bottom, and that this grate of strong brazen network was fastened, just half way up the interior, reaching therefore, one cubit and a half from the ground,*

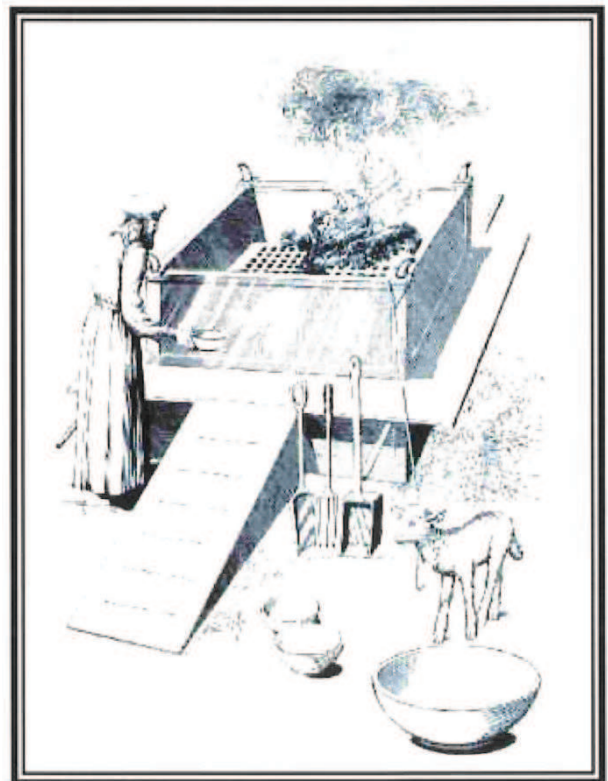


*exactly the height of the Mercy Seat upon the Ark; to the corners of the grate, which must have pierced the corners of the altar, four rings were attached, serving as places for the staves. The grate would by its strength prevent the altar from twisting out of its form when it was moved; and the weight of the whole would be sustained by the rings to which the staves were attached. The word grate appear nowhere else; it is derived from a root meaning to plait or twist; the network is also added in the description of the construction of the grate, and thus this portion of the altar was formed of strong interwoven bars of brass which could not be broken.” (Soltau, p. 132)*

However, those who defend the exterior network make a similar argument in support of their view as providing the best structural support:

*“But why emphasize that the grate is under the collar that presumably runs around the outside. It is also hard to understand how and why the carrying poles are to be attached to an interior grate rather than to the altar itself. It is possible that the rings pass through the altar's sides, so that the poles lock the grate into the altar. The alternative opinion, to which I incline regards the grate as a netting around the altar's sides, keeping them in alignment and attaching them to the poles...The rim would let the altar rest snugly within the mesh and pole assembly without falling through when lifted.” (Propp, pp. 422, 423)*

**“Place it** (the grating and/ or the bronze network) **under the ledge of the altar so that it is half way up the altar.** The text’s general terminology allows for a variety of interpretations so without doubt the debate will continue. **“The ledge of the altar”** appears to have been largely decorative, while also serving to distinguish the upper and lower segments of the structure from one another, which was to be significant in the placement of blood for a number of the sacrifices. Others contend that this ledge was intended as a walkway for the priests who were conducting the sacrifices, enabling them to more conveniently access the fire grate at the top of the altar. The Hebrew noun could be interpreted either way. Such a walkway, however, while practically convenient, would have significantly enlarged the altar and made it much more difficult to transport. It seems unlikely that such a major feature of the structure

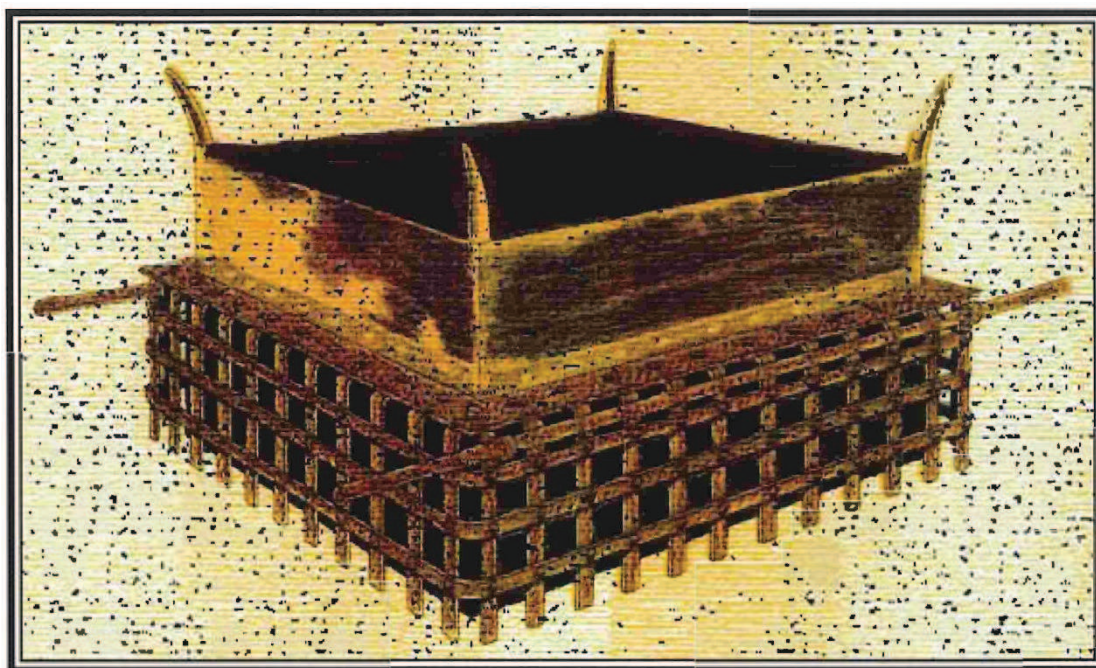


**“Altar Depicted With Walkway Ledge”**

would have been introduced in such a haphazard manner.

***“Make poles of acacia wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze. The poles are to be inserted into the rings so that they will be on two sides of the altar when it is carried.”***

- The method of transportation for the altar is the same as that of the other furnishings of the Tabernacle, although in this instance - as a part of the courtyard- the acacia poles are to be covered in bronze. Neither their diameter or length is specified. In this instance, it may be assumed that the carrying poles were significantly longer than those of the Ark to allow for eight priests to bear the altar, given its greater weight and size. For no doubt the same reason, unlike the sacred ark, the text suggests that the poles of the altar are to be removed when the altar has been set up for use – ***“when it is carried.”***



***“The Altar of Burnt Offering With Bronze Network Base”***

"Make the altar hollow, out of boards. It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain." -Although the NIV's translation - "Make the altar hollow, out of boards" is consistent with the design already specified, it does not reflect the wording of the Hebrew text which literally reads - "Hollow planked you shall make it. " Most scholars agree that the sense of the text is that this large fixture was to be fashioned of wooden planks with a hollow center. This would reduce the weight of the structure significantly. Cassutto further speculates that the panels of the lower half of the altar were perforated, or open altogether, then filled with field stone, and surrounded by the bronze network to facilitate the updraft needed for the fire.

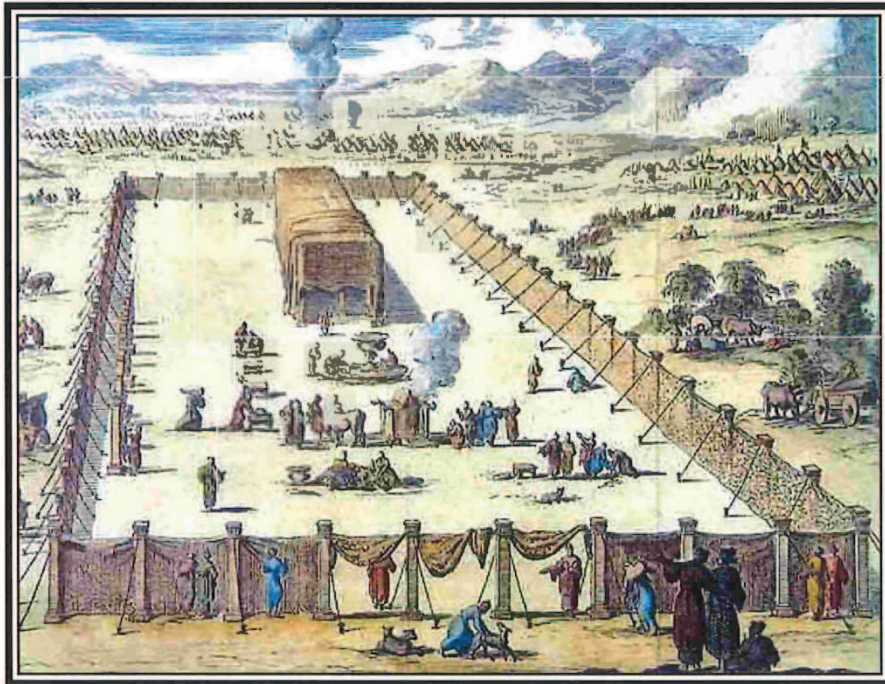
*“The sides of the altar were not whole, but were full of apertures, especially in the lower half, in order that the air might enter from below and facilitate the kindling of the fire on the altar (hence it is to be assumed that they*

*preferred to fill the interior of the altar with stones or pebbles rather than soil); possibly in the lower half there were only wooden lathes joining the four corners. In order to give strength and stability to the entire structure, despite the openings, a bronze network was to encompass the lower portion of the altar, extending half way up, and through the holes of the net the air would be able to enter without hindrance.” (Cassutto, p. 364)*

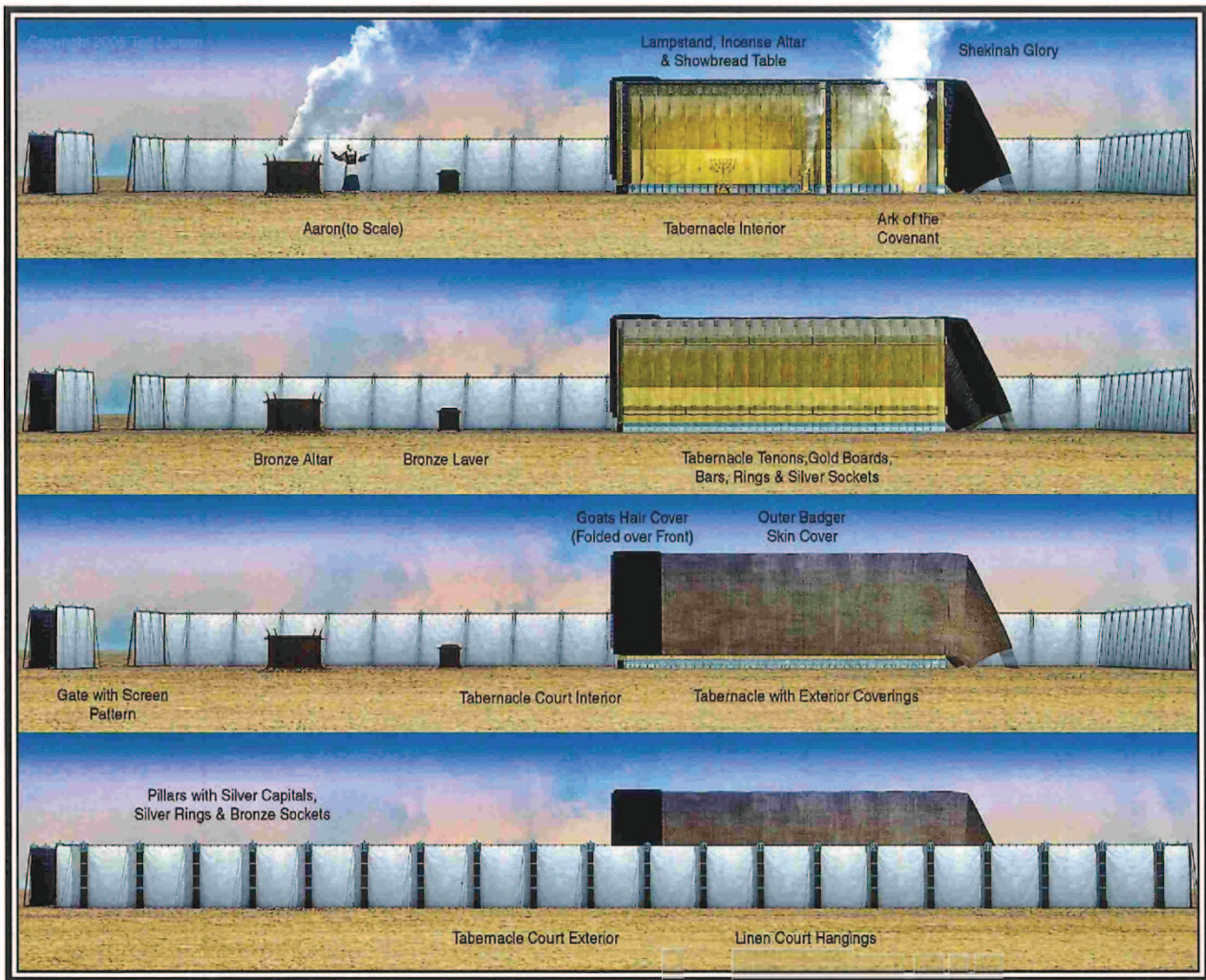
**“It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain.”** - The design of the bronze altar concludes with a reminder of the visual blueprint which the Lord had presented to Moses on Mount Sinai. Nothing was to be left to the imagination of man. The Tabernacle and its furnishings were to be constructed exactly as God had shown Moses. All the ambiguities with which we struggle in this verbal summary of that design had already been precisely revealed to Moses so that he would be able to provide comprehensive instructions for the craftsmen who would perform the actual construction.

### ***Verses 9 - 14***

***Make a courtyard for the Tabernacle. The south side shall be a hundred cubits long and is to have curtains of finely twisted linen, with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases and with silver hooks and bands on the posts. The north side shall also be a hundred cubits long, and is to have curtains with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases and with silver hooks and bands on the posts. The west end of the courtyard shall be fifty cubits wide and have curtains with ten posts and ten bases. On the east end, toward the sunrise, the courtyard shall also be fifty cubits wide. Curtains fifteen cubits long are to be on one side of the entrance, with three posts and three bases, and curtains fifteen cubits long are to be on the other side, with three posts and three bases.***



*18<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving of the Tabernacle and Its Courtyard*

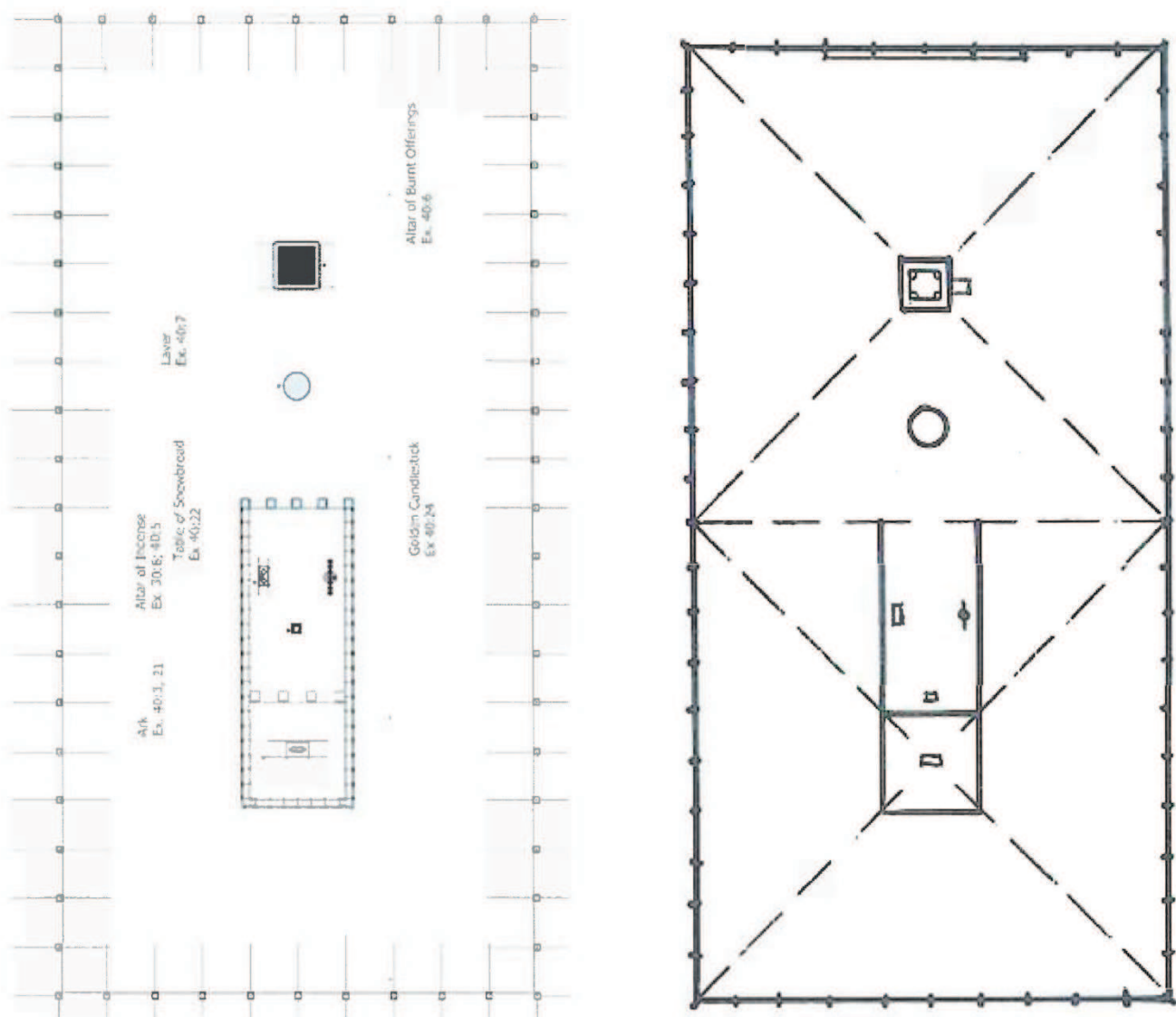


*Cross-Section of the Tabernacle and the Courtyard by Ted Larson*

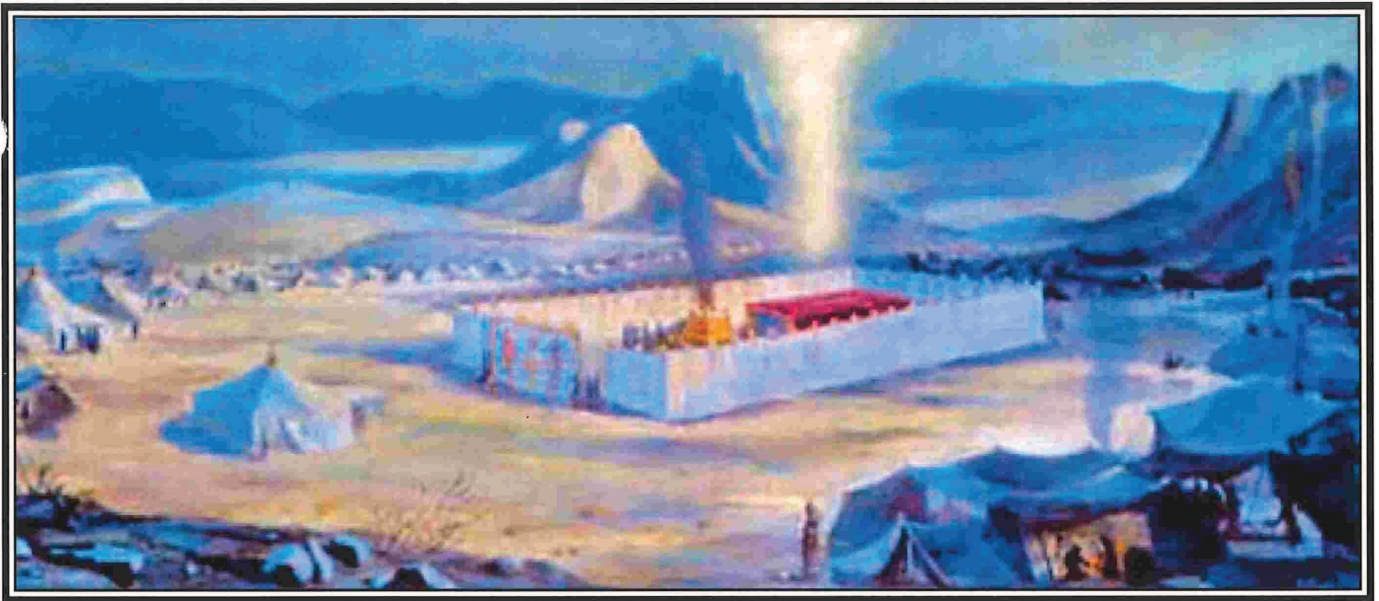
**“Make a courtyard for the Tabernacle.”** - In the preceding paragraphs, the description of the Tabernacle itself had followed the description of the sacred furniture which would be placed within it. The same pattern prevails here. The structure of the courtyard follows the description of the bronze altar and its implements. This unique sequence serves to emphasize that it is not the buildings themselves, as some sort of sacred shrine, which bestow sanctity upon the Tabernacle, but the divinely instituted activities which are to take place there. This point is consistent with the consistent distinction which has been maintained throughout Exodus upon the uniqueness of Israelite religion from the pagan cults of all the nations which surround them.

At the same time, the courtyard continues the concept of enhanced sanctity as one moves inward from the encampment toward the heart of the Tabernacle, the Ark within the Holy of Holies. To this end, the courtyard barrier established a reserved area around the sanctuary which was reserved for Israelites who had come to offer a sacrifice or to participate in the various rituals of the Tabernacle. This concept was to be refined in the Temple with what would be a series of four - increasingly exclusive - courts surrounding the sanctuary: the

Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Women, the Court of Israel, and the Court of the Priests. The text does not fix the location of the Tabernacle within the courtyard. However, the consensus among both rabbis and Bible scholars has been that the eastern side of the structure - with the entrance to the Holy Place - was at the center of the courtyard, fifty cubits from both the east and the west walls. If the tent was also centered north and south, there would than have been twenty cubits between the courtyard barrier and the three walls of the Tabernacle. The courtyard between the entrance to the Holy Place and the entrance gate would have been fifty cubits by fifty cubits. Given this placement, the diagonals of the western half of the court would have intersected at the center of the Most Holy Place, where the Ark stood. The Altar of Burnt Offering would most probably have been placed where the diagonals met at the center of the eastern half. The symmetry of the design was perfect, focused on the Ark and the Altar.



*Diagrams of the Tabernacle and Its Courtyard*



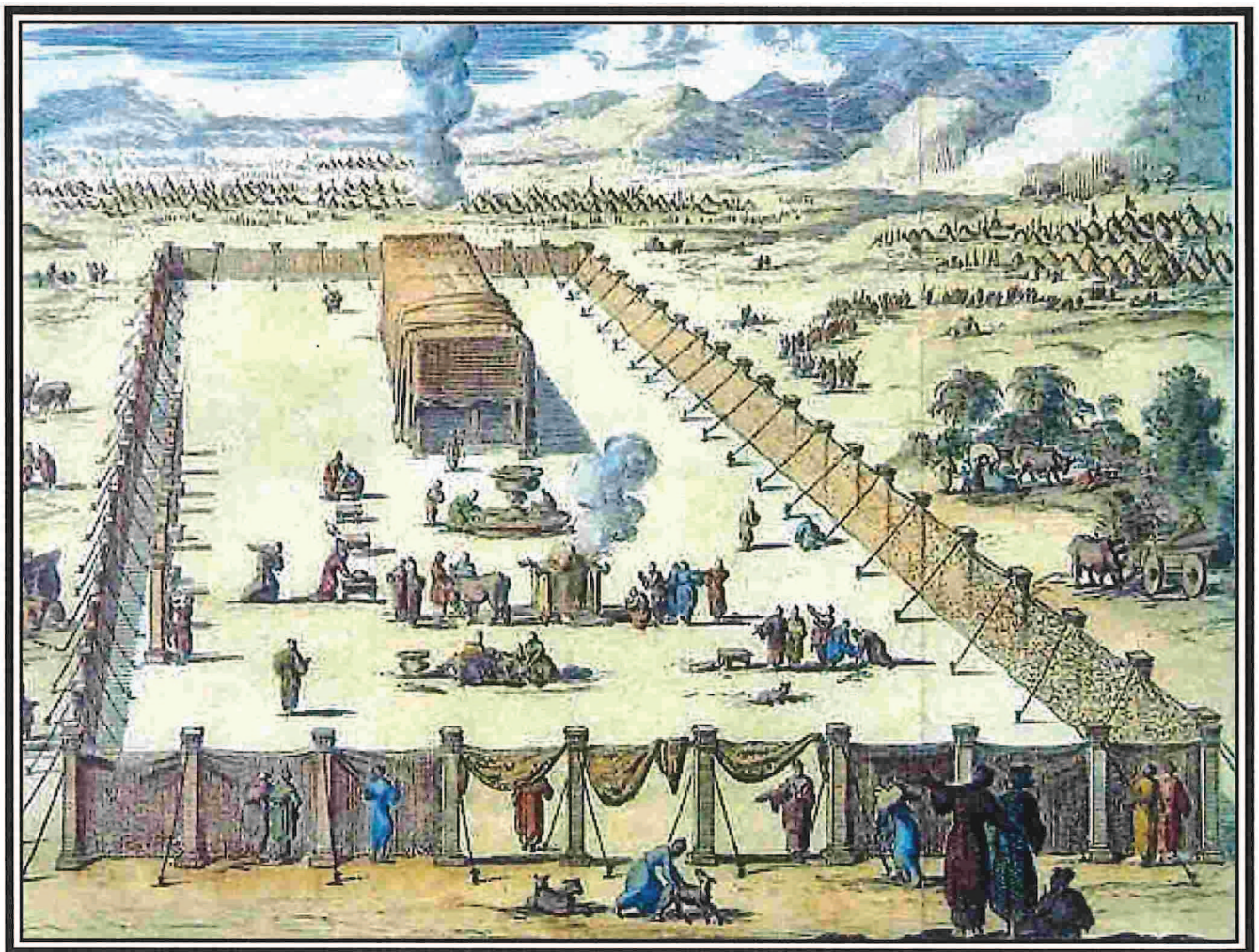
*The Tabernacle Court in the Midst of the Wilderness Encampment - Note the 10 Cubit High Altar and the Tent of Moses Which Was the Meeting Place of the Sanhedrin Before the Courtyard Gate*

The courtyard curtain was to be **“five cubits”** (7.5 feet) high. This height would have been sufficient to block the view of those within the camp and preserved the privacy and sanctity of the Tabernacle itself and the sacrificial rituals performed within the courtyard. The sanctuary, which was fifteen feet high would have been clearly visible over the curtain. *“Indeed, a view from outside the Courtyard of the Tabernacle standing within the Courtyard, given what and whom it symbolized, was entirely desirable.”* (Durham, p. 378) The curtains were to be woven of **“finely twisted linen.”** Unlike the Tabernacle curtains, no dye is mentioned, so presumably the courtyard curtains were to be off-white, the natural color of linen fabric. This is a different term than the previous references describing the Tabernacle linen. Those hangings, interwoven with wool yarn, would have been considerably heavier. **“Finely twisted linen”** is the same word which was used in reference to the sails of ship. This impression is reinforced by the fact that the text does not mention a method of anchoring the bottom of the sheets to the ground, which would have allowed them to billow in the wind like a ship’s sails. The curtains were to be mounted on a series of sixty posts with bronze bases and silver hooks and bands. The material from which the pillars were to be made is not specified. Presumably it was acacia wood like all the rest of the Tabernacle’s components. This terminology would appear to suggest that the curtains were strung from rods which ran from pillar to pillar. The pillars stood at five cubits intervals. There is no indication that the curtains were to be sewn together with one another. A twenty cubit opening was reserved on the eastern end for the entrance to the courtyard.

**“For the entrance to the courtyard, provide a curtain twenty cubits long, of purple blue and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen- the work of an embroiderer - with four posts and four bases.”** - Unlike most of the courtyard curtain, the entrance curtain displayed the bright colors of the Tabernacle itself – *“as if to permit a glimpse of the splendor within.”*

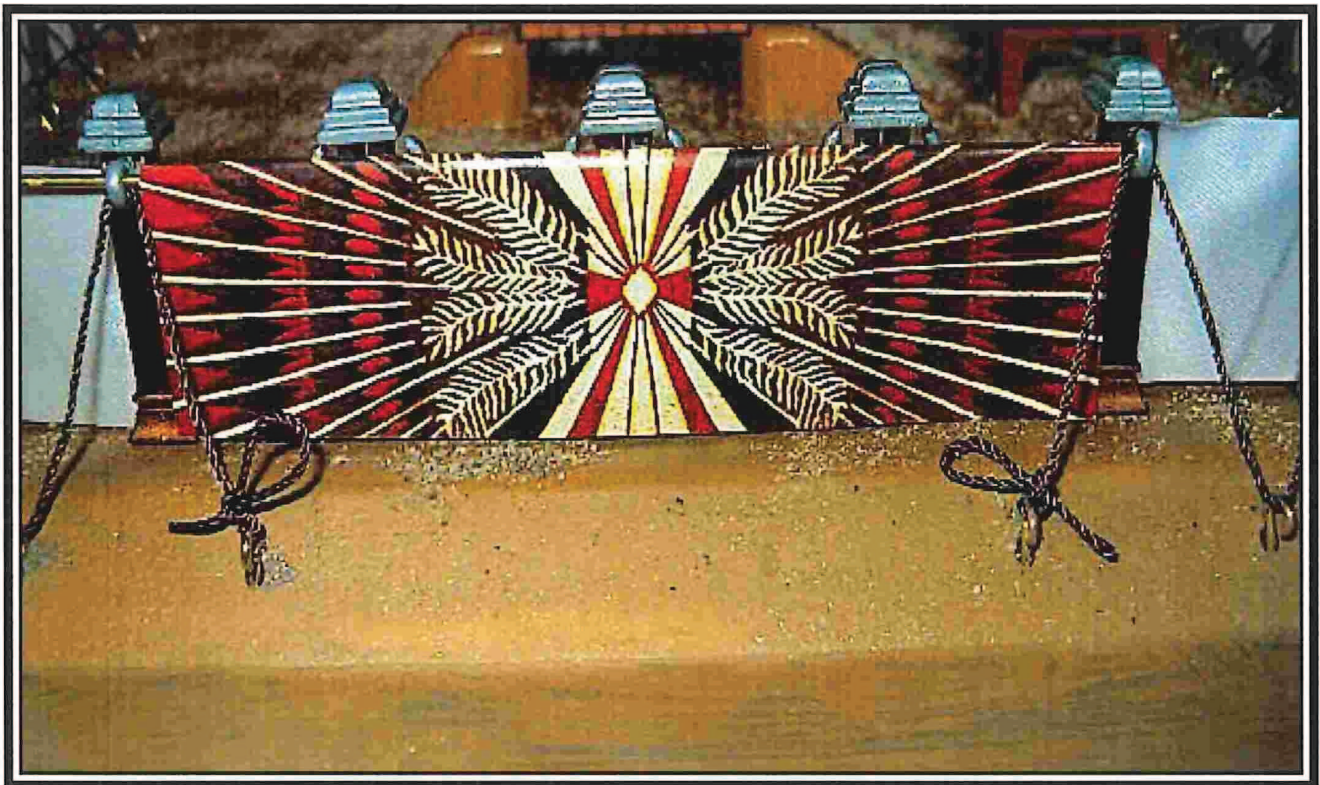
(Propp, p. 427) There is no indication that the entrance curtain was adorned with the same cherubim displayed on the veils and coverings of the sanctuary. This entrance curtain was

to be *“the work of an embroiderer.”* As in the previous reference to the entrance curtain of the tabernacle itself (26:36), this phrase indicates a level of craftsmanship less sophisticated than that which was required for the inner curtains of the holy of holies and the holy place. Once again, the principle of gradually diminishing sanctity, as one moved further away from the ark which signified God’s presence is signaled by the materials and the craftsmanship used in the court’s construction. While the entrance to the tabernacle was supported by five pillars (26:17), this curtain is to be mounted upon four pillars – *“with four posts and four bases.”*



*18 Century Engraving of the Tabernacle and Its Courtyard*

*“All the posts around the courtyard are to have silver bands and hooks ...”* – The description of the courtyard concludes with a summary statement of the hardware required to suspend the curtains from the posts and support the posts themselves. The account adds a general statement at the end that all of the hardware for the entire edifice was to be fashioned of bronze. The Hebrew text uses the broad term *“hatser”* which describes not only the tent itself, but includes the courtyard and all of its furnishings. As previously noted, the reference to *“all the tent pegs for it and those of the courtyard”* would appear to indicate that the various layers of covering over the sanctuary were anchored to the ground with pegs, although there had been no mention of this feature in the description of the tent itself. *“Tent pegs probably were also used in securing the tabernacle proper, and since these would stand in the ground outside the tabernacle, they too would have been bronze rather than gold or silver.”* (Stuart, p. 600)



*“Reconstruction of the Entrance Curtain to the Courtyard”*

### ***Verses 20 - 21***

*Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning. In the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain that is in front of the Testimony, Aaron and his sons are to keep the lamps burning before the Lord from evening till morning. This is to be a lasting ordinance among the Israelites for the generations to come.*



***“Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil ...”*** - The instructions for the design of the golden lamp stand had referred to ***“oil for lighting”*** (25:6) without further specification. The text now deals more specifically with the fuel that was to be used to provide illumination within the Holy Place. Unlike the tents of Israel where the lamps were extinguished at night while the people slept, the lamps burned throughout the night within the Tent of Yahweh. This practice was an assurance to the people that their God did not sleep and His watchful protection over them was uninterrupted during the dark hours of the night. Thus the psalmist rejoiced:

***“I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip - He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you; the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from harm - He will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and your going both now and forever more.”*** (Psalm 121)

These beautiful words of promise have been incorporated into the liturgy of Holy Baptism in the blessing pronounced immediately before the child is baptized into the household of God.



***“He Who Watches Over Israel Will Neither Slumber Nor Sleep”***

The olive oil to be used in the menorah was to be of the highest quality – ***“clear oil of pressed olives.”*** The clarity of the olive oil emphasizes the fact that it was to be pressed and filtered over and over again to remove any trace of sediment. This would enable the

wicks of the lampstand to burn cleanly and with a minimum of smoke. In this way, the enclosed interior of the Tabernacle would not be darkened by soot from the flames burning throughout every night.

*“Oil extracted from olives is specified because several other sources of oil, including sesame seed, flax, and animal fats, were utilized in the ancient Near East. The oil used for the Tabernacle lamps had to be ‘clear, that is, refined so as to be free of lees. This condition was obtained by pounding the olives in a mortar with a pestle rather than grinding them in a mill - hence the Hebrew word ‘katit’ – ‘beaten.’ The oil was then passed through a strainer, resulting in clear refined grade that yields a far brighter light and produces a minimum of smoke. The category of ‘zakh’ oil is used in the Bible exclusively for the Tabernacle lamps.” (Sama, p. 176)*



*“The High Priest Lighting the Menorah”*

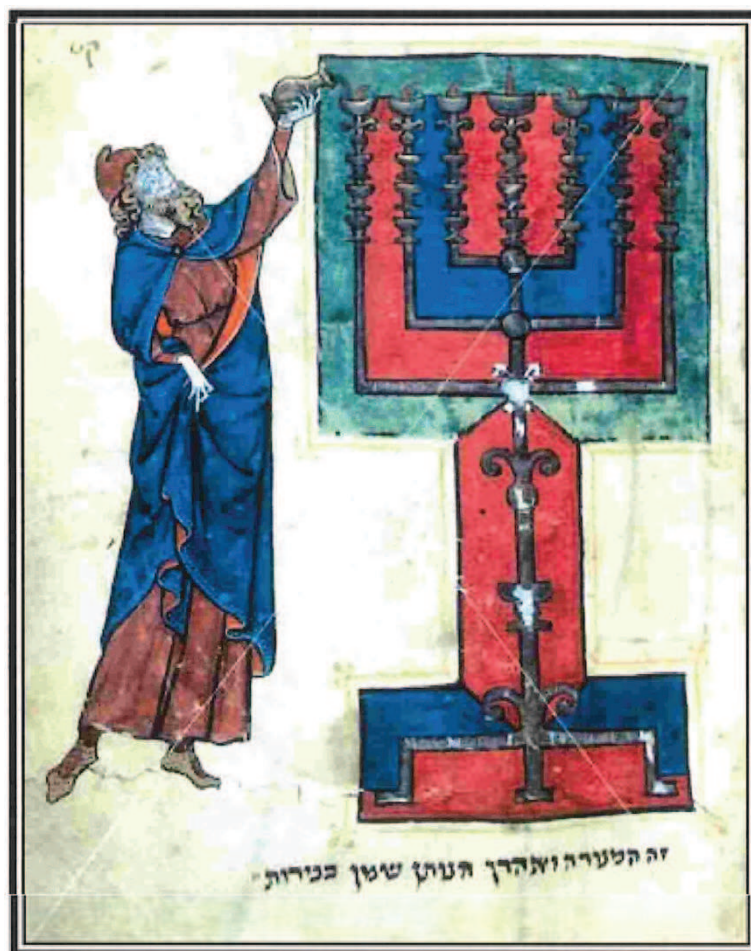
***“In the Tent of Meeting, that is, in front of the Testimony”*** - Two characteristic phrases are used to identify the location of these activities. First, the Tabernacle is identified as ***“the Tent of Meeting.”*** This designation affirms the tent sanctuary as the divinely designated site wherein God has promised to dwell among and interact with His people. Secondly, ***“in front of the Testimony”*** anticipates the placements of the tablets of the Ten Commandments within the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was commonly referred to as ***“the Ark of the Testimony”*** because it contained these most sacred objects, inscribed by the hand of God Himself. ***“Place the cover on top of the ark and put in***

***the Ark the Testimony which I will give you. There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the Ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all My commands for the Israelites.”*** (Exodus 25:21 - 22) ***“There I will meet with you and speak to you; there I will also meet with the Israelites and the place will be consecrated to My glory. So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and will consecrate Aaron and his sons as priests. There I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God.”*** (Exodus 29:43 - 45) In this context, ***“in front of the Testimony”*** means in the Holy Place outside of the Veil which marked the boundary between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies which contained the Ark.

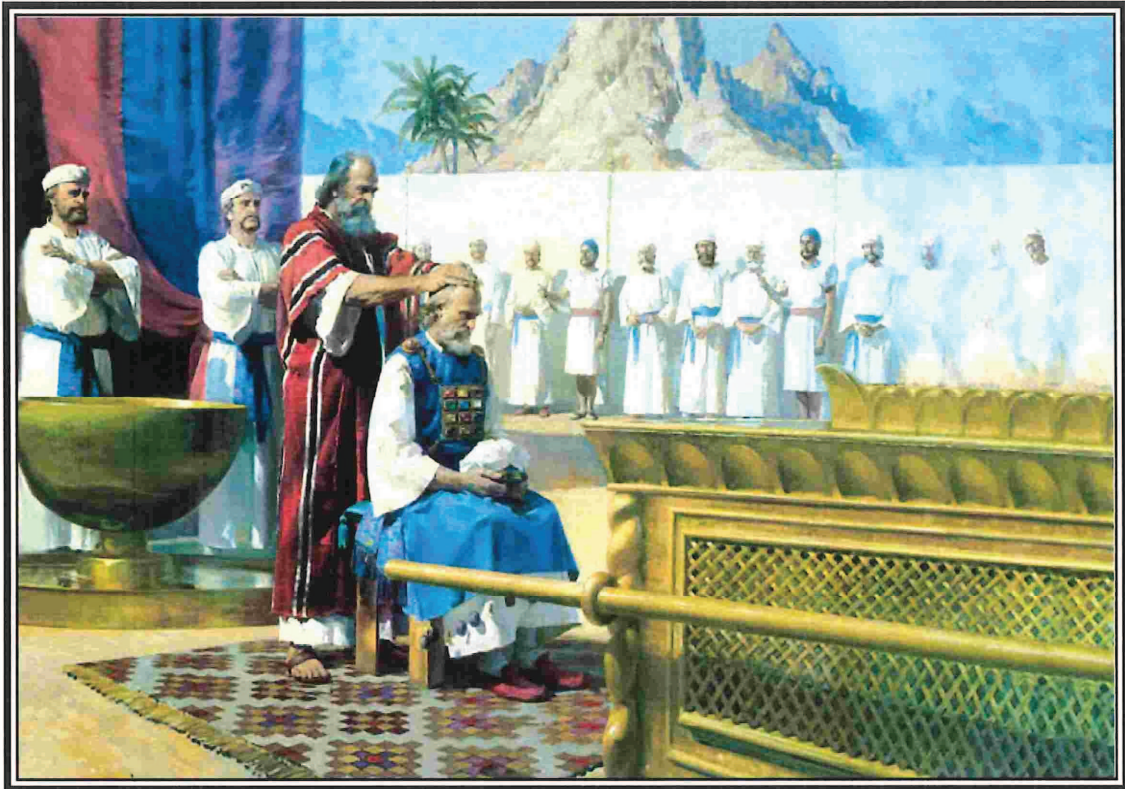
***“Aaron and his sons are to keep the lamps burning ...”*** - The daily tending of the menorah, carefully trimming wicks, removing the ash, and refilling the oil, was a crucial part of the priests’ daily ritual. The text here suggests that this ceremony was to be performed by the High Priest himself – ***“Aaron and his sons.”***

***“This is to be a lasting ordinance among the Israelites for the generations to come.”*** - The light of the Menorah, burning through the night without fail, was a powerful image in the religious consciousness of Israel. So, for example, in 1 Samuel 3:3, the text indicated the impending apostasy of the nation with the words – ***“the lamp of God had not yet gone out”*** in the sanctuary at Shiloh. Within modern Judaism this image persists in the practice of maintaining an eternal light *“ner tamid”* which burns above the Torah Ark within the synagogue.

*“This lamp serves as a reminder of the original menorah, although the assigned place of that lampstand was on the western side of the Tabernacle, not on the eastern side where the eternal light is now placed in the synagogues. The ‘ner tamid’ also symbolizes the divine presence, the Shekhinah that accompanies the community of Israel through its dispersal.”* (Sama, p. 176)



***“Aaron Pouring Oil Into the Menorah” - Medieval Illustration***



*“Moses Ordains Aaron in the Courtyard of the Tabernacle Before Mount Sinai”*

## ***Exodus 28***

***Have Aaron, your brother, brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve Me as priests. Make sacred garments for you brother Aaron to give him dignity and honor. Tell all the skilled men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so that he may serve me as priest. These are the garments they are to make: a breastpiece, and ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so they may serve Me as priests. Have them use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen. Make the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen, the work of a skilled craftsman. It is to have two shoulder pieces attached to two of its corners, so it can be fastened. Its skillfully woven waistband is to be like it - of one piece with the ephod and made with gold, and with blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen. Take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel in the order of their birth - six names on one stone and the remaining six on the other. Engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones the way a gem cutter engraves a seal. Then mount the stones in gold filigree settings and fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord. Make gold filigree settings and two braided chains of pure gold, like a rope, and attach the chains to the settings. Fashion a breastpiece for making decisions - the work of a skilled craftsman. Make it like the***

*ephod: of gold, and of blue purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen. It is to be square - a span long and a span wide - and folded double. Then mount four rows of precious stones on it. In the first row there shall be a ruby, a topaz and a beryl; in the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and an emerald; in the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; in the fourth row, a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. Mount them in gold filigree settings. There are to be twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes. For the breastpiece make braided chains of pure gold, like a rope. Make two gold rings for it and fasten them to the rings of the breastpiece. Fasten the two gold chains to the rings at the corners of the breastpiece, and the other ends of the chains to the two settings, attaching them to the shoulder pieces of the ephod at the front. Make two gold rings and attach them to the other corners of the breastpiece on the inside edge next to the ephod. Make two more gold rings and attach them to the bottoms of the shoulder pieces on the front of the ephod, close to the seam, just above the waistband of the ephod. The rings of the breastpiece are to be tied to the rings of the ephod with blue cord, connecting it to the*



*waistband, so that the breastpiece will not swing out from the ephod. Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the Lord. Also put the Urim and the Thummin in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the Lord. Thus, Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord. Make the robe of the ephod entirely of blue cloth, with an opening for the head in its center. There shall be a woven edge like a collar around this opening, so that it will not tear. Make pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn around the hem of the robe, with gold bells between them. The gold bells and the pomegranates are to alternate around the hem of the robe. Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he will not die. Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: **HOLY TO THE LORD**. Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be*

*“The Vestments of the High Priest”*



*Greek Orthodox Jeon of Aaron*

*on the front of the turban. It will be on Aaron's forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever the gifts may be. It will be on Aaron's forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the Lord. Weave the tunic of fine linen and make the turban of fine linen. The sash is to be the work of an embroiderer. Make tunics, sashes, and headbands for Aaron's sons, to give them dignity and honor. After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve Me as priests. Make linen undergarments to cover the body, reaching from the waist to the thigh. Aaron and his sons must wear them whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, or approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place, so they will not incur guilt and die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his sons.*

### *Verse 1*

*“Have your brother Aaron brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, that they may serve Me as priests.”*

The services and rituals anticipated by the Tabernacle and its Greek Orthodox Jeon of Aaron furnishings necessitated the establishment of a priesthood which would serve as the officiants of the sanctuary. As the Tabernacle and every detail of its design and construction had been determined by God Himself, so also the priesthood of the Tabernacle would be established by God Himself. *“Only God could make someone a priest. It was not a human choice.”* (Stuart, p. 603) Neither wealth nor power could gain access to the priesthood of the true God. On the eve of a battle with Jereboam, King of Israel, Abijah, the grandson of Solomon, ridiculed the northern kingdom for having a priesthood open to anyone with the payment price: *“But didn't you drive out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and make priests of your own, as the other nations do? Whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams may become a priest of what are not gods.”* (2 Chronicles 13:9) Uzziah, the King of Judah, presumed because of his exalted rank to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense, usurping the function of a priest. Azariah, the high priest, backed by eighty courageous Levites, barred the king's way: *“It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and you will not be honored.”* (2 Chronicles 26:18) The king was struck with leprosy as he stood before the incense altar as punishment for his sin. As the result of this divine appointment and establishment, the priesthood was held in the highest esteem in Israel. When Eli's failure to control and discipline his rebellious sons Hophni and Phineas brought the priesthood into disrepute, God sent a

prophet to the old man with these stem words of rebuke:

***“This is what the Lord says: ‘Did I not clearly reveal Myself to your father’s house when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh? I chose your father Aaron out of all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to go up to My altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod in My presence. I also gave your father’s house all the offerings made with fire in My presence. Why do you scorn My sacrifice and offering that I prescribed or My dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than Me?’”*** (1 Samuel 2:27 - 29)



***“The Vestments of the High Priest in the Order in Which They Were Put On”  
17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Bible Engraving***

In the sense of a divine call which set apart the family of Aaron for service to God, the call of the priesthood paralleled and extended the call of the Israelite nation. The Apostle Peter reflected that parallel in his application of these concepts to the people of God in Christ, both Jew and Gentile who have become the new Israel:

***“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus ... But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you are not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*** (1 Peter 2:5,9 - 10)

In his classic 1876 study *Sacred Tabernacle of the Hebrews: The History and Significance*, Edward E. Atwater defines the parallel as a wondrous demonstration of the gracious love of God in Christ, with particular reference to the 1 Peter passage:

*“This divine election of the family of Aaron out of Israel signifies that those who have been admitted to filial fellowship with the Holy One of Israel were admitted thereto by the sovereign choice of God. As Jehovah chose the family of Aaron out of the tribe of Levi, the Levites out of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the Hebrews out of all the nations, so He has chosen His spiritual seed out of every kindred and people and tongue and nation. Without such election they would have remained like the rest of mankind, strangers to the covenant instead of becoming ‘a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices’ (1 Peter 2:5) The New Testament writers make this divine election very prominent, declaring that those who through Christ become sons of God were born not of the will of man but of God, were called to be saints, were chosen before the foundation of the world that they should be holy, were predestinated to the adoption of children, were elect unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ.” (Atwater, p. 321)*



*“Aaron the High Priest of the Israelites”  
by Anton Kern*

The instructions of this chapter focus mainly on the high priest. Leviticus 8 deals with the priesthood more generally. The vestments of the High Priest consisted of eight articles of clothing while the vestments of an ordinary priest consisted of four articles. No mention is made of footwear in either case because the priests officiated barefoot in recognition of the sanctity of the ground upon which they walked. (Cf. Exodus 3:5)

The text offers no explanation for the selection of Aaron and his sons. The simple identification of Aaron as *“your brother”* does not suggest that he was chosen because of his connection to Moses. Nor does Aaron represent the tribe of Levi. Instead, he is to be selected from *“among the Israelites.”* The High Priest, as the details of his vestments clearly indicate, will represent the entire nation. This fundamental change in the order of things marks a major step toward the transformation of Israel from a confederation of independent tribal families to a unified people. The services



and sacrifices which heretofore had been conducted independently by tribal elders would now be conducted together for all in the Tabernacle by a divinely appointed priesthood who would function on behalf of all the people from every tribe.

*“The union of all Hebrews of whatever parentage in the worship of the Tabernacle was an important element of national life. The tribes were from henceforth, at least so far as concerns the rites of religion, united as a nation, and the family of Aaron were, by appointment of Jehovah, mediators between the nation and Himself.” (Atwater, p. 318)*

The phrase **“to serve Me as priests”** recurs three times in this segment as a basic theme. The Hebrew word for priest is *“kohen.”* The etymology of the term, as one would expect with such a critically important word, has been the subject of considerable debate. It would appear to have been derived the concept of *“standing between”* or *“standing in the middle.”* This derivation suggests the role of the priest as mediator. The first two priests mentioned in the Bible are both Gentiles - Melchizedek, the priest/king of Salem (Genesis 14:18) and Jethro, the priest of Midian (Exodus 18:12) This intriguing fact demonstrates the existence of a remnant of believers among the nations in addition to God’s relationship with the descendants of Abraham. Abraham’s recognition of Melchizedek and the validity of his priesthood - by accepting his blessing - further indicates that the first Hebrew did not



*“Abraham Receiving the Blessing of the Priest Melchizadek” by Heemskirk*

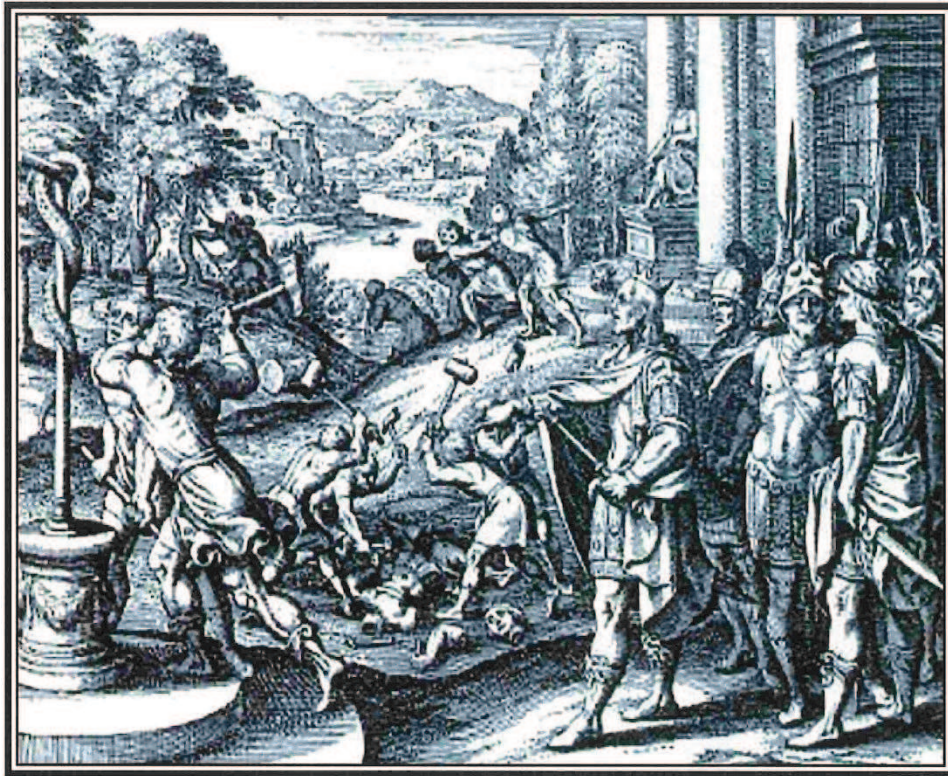
consider Israel's relationship with the true God to be exclusive. Although primarily a religious term, "kohen" is also used in the Old Testament in reference to officers within the royal court (cf. 2 Samuel 8:18; 20:26; 1 Kings 4:8; 1 Chronicles 18:17). James Murphy offers the following general definition, including both the religious or royal settings:

*"The priests stands at the middle point between God and man...From God, the priest comes to man, authorized to invite the sinner to return with penitence, confession and faith to God, and to make the propitiatory sacrifice for all who repent. From man, he returns to God, having made propitiation, to make prevailing intercession for all whom he represents. His generic character, then, is to be the mediator between God and man... 'Kohen' originally meant a mediator, advocate, or intercessor appointed by the sovereign. The element of sin in the case of man before God also involves the office of expiation, by an efficacious mediator, and this is the priest, strictly so called."* (Murphy, p. 313)

The appointment by the lord (divine or human) is a critical component in the definition. The mediation and intercession of a priest before the Lord on behalf of the subject can only take place because the mediator has been chosen and authorized by the Lord. When Korah, Dathan and Abiram's rebellion had challenged the preeminence of Moses and Aaron among the Levites, the Lord affirmed Aaron's appointment as High Priest through the budding of Aaron's staff. (Numbers 16 - 17) God then declared to Aaron in absolutely unequivocal terms:

*"You are to be responsible for the care of the sanctuary and the altar, so that wrath will not fall on the Israelites again. I Myself have selected your fellow Levites from among the Israelites as a gift to you, dedicated to the Lord, to do the work at the Tent of Meeting. But only you and your sons may serve as priests in connection with everything at the altar and inside the curtain. I am giving you the priesthood as a gift. Anyone else who comes near the sanctuary must be put to death."* (Numbers 18:5 - 7)

Both prophets and priests were called and chosen by God. However, the basic difference between their respective callings pertained to their role in God's dealings with His people. The prophet spoke for God to the people. He proclaimed the Word of the Lord. The priest spoke for the people to God. He interceded on their behalf and offered the sacrifices before the Lord which atoned for their sins. In the services of the Tabernacle this priestly intercession before the Lord could take any one of a variety of forms including verbal prayers, liturgical services of worship, or asking God to reveal His will through the Urim and the Thummin kept within the High Priest's breastplate. But the essence of the priestly function were the sacrifices through which God's righteous anger against sin was removed in the manner which God had proscribed.



*“King Hezekiah Cleansing the Temple of Idols” – 17<sup>th</sup> Century Woodcut*

Unfortunately, the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants often failed in their responsibility to serve as the spiritual leaders of the nation. When King Hezekiah led the reformation which restored the worship of the Temple, the priests (the descendants of Aaron) and the Levites had to be encouraged by the king and the people to take up their spiritual leadership once again:

*“The priests, however were too few to skin all the burnt offerings, so their kinsmen, the Levites helped them until the task was finished and until other priests had been consecrated, for the Levites had been more conscientious in consecrating themselves that the priests had been...The priests and the Levites were ashamed and consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings to the Temple of the Lord. Then they took up their regular positions as prescribed in the Law of Moses, the man of God.” (2 Chronicles 29:34; 30:15 - 16)*

The prophet Isaiah sternly denounced the corruption of Israel’s priesthood and their disgusting behavior within the Temple itself:

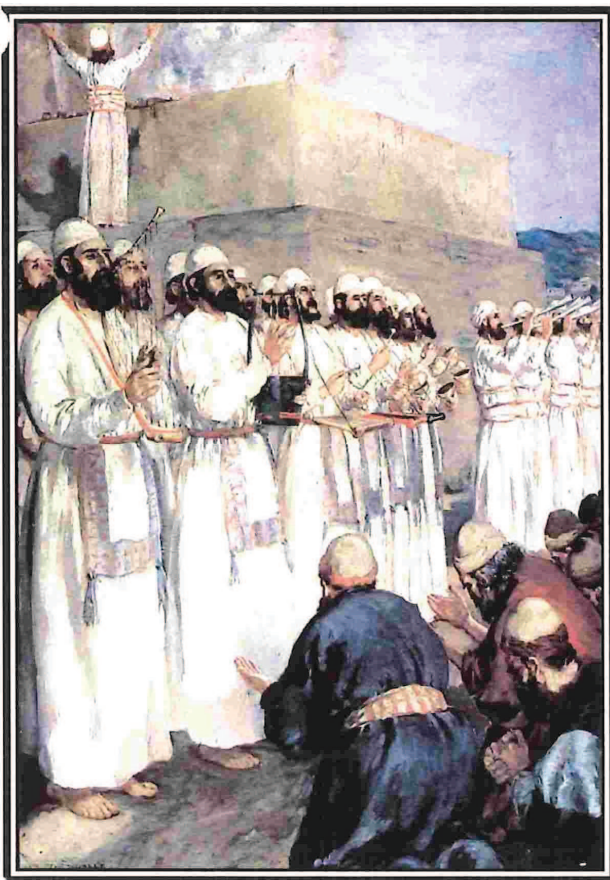
*“And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer: priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering decisions. All the tables are covered with vomit and there is not a spot without filth.” (Isaiah 28:7-8)*

Jeremiah's most dangerous opponents were the leaders of the priesthood, as he attempted to proclaim the Word of the Lord in the closing days of the kingdom of Judah. God promised His prophet:

***“Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land - against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the land. They will fight against you but they will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you, declares the Lord.”***  
(Jeremiah 1:18 - 19)

***“When the priest Pashur, son of Immer, the chief officer in the temple of the Lord heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the upper Gate of Benjamin at the Lord's Temple.”*** (Jeremiah 20:1 - 2)

The vision of Ezekiel revealed the idolatry which was being practiced by the priesthood within the Lord's holy temple. The Lord condemned their apostasy as an abomination which would drive Him from His own sanctuary:



***“The Levites Rededicate the Temple for King Hezekiah” by William Hole***

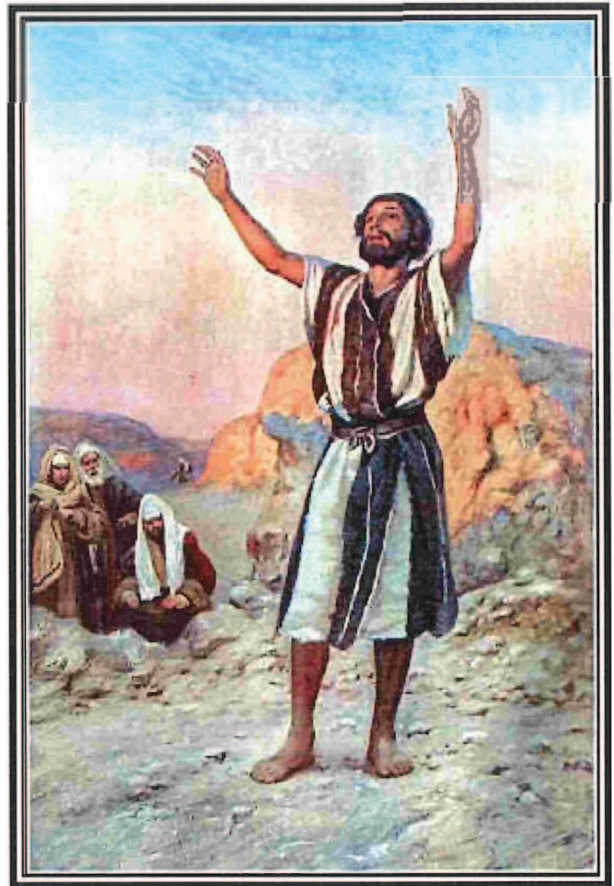
***“Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, look toward the north,’ so I looked and in the entrance north of the gate of the altar I saw the idol of jealousy. And He said to me, ‘Son of man, do you see what they are doing - the utterly detestable things the House of Israel is doing here, things that will drive me far from My Sanctuary? But you will see things that are even more detestable.’”*** (Ezekiel 8:4 - 6)

The Old Testament concluded with a fiery condemnation of priestly corruption from the Prophet Malachi. The priests were growing rich as they skimmed the people's offerings and presented lame and deformed animals as the sacrifices,

***“It is you, O priests, who show contempt for My Name. But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for Your Name?’ You place defiled food on My altar ... ‘O that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you,’ says the Lord Almighty,***

*'and I will accept no offering from your hands ... But you profane My Name by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' And you say, 'What a burden,' and you sniff at it contemptuously ... And now this admonition is for you, O priests. If you do not listen and if you do not set your heart to honor My Name, 'says the Lord Almighty,' I will send a curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them because you have not set your hearts to honor Me.'* (Malachi 1 6, 10, 12; 2:1 - 2)

There were a great many faithful and devout priests across the centuries. Even as he denounced those who had betrayed their office, Malachi recalled the crucial role of the faithful priest: *"My covenant with Levi was a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence, and he revered Me and stood in awe of My Name. True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness and turned many from sin. For the lips of the priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction - because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty."* (Malachi 2:5 - 7)



*"The Prophet Malachi Denouncing the Corruption of the Priesthood" Bible Illustration by William Hole*

The New Testament teaches that the office of the High Priest, and all the services and sacrifices of the Tabernacle, prefigured and were ultimately fulfilled in the self - sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross for the sins of mankind. The Book of Hebrews discussed the Aaronic priesthood and the sacrificial services of the Tabernacle in specific detail demonstrating its perfect fulfillment in the priesthood of Jesus:

*"We do have such a high priest who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle, set up by the Lord, not by man. Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and a shadow of what is in heaven. That is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle; 'See to it that*



*“Jesus Christ Our Great High Priest”*

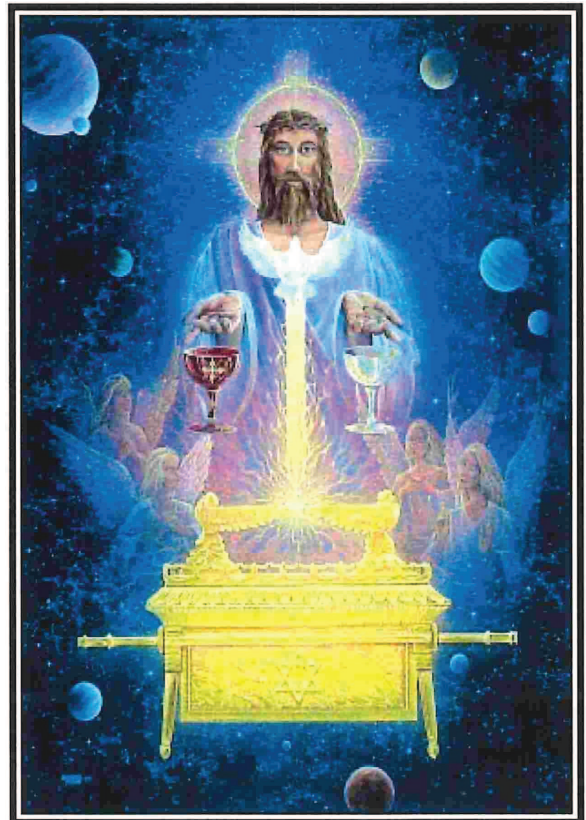
*you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’ But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is the Mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises ... When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through a greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption ... For this reason, Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance - now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.” (Hebrews 8:1 - 6; 9:11 - 12, 15)*

Premier 17<sup>th</sup> Century Lutheran theologian John Gerhard offered this meticulous definition of the High Priestly office of Christ with overwhelming Biblical citation:

*“It is the duty of a priest not only to sacrifice, pray, intercede, and bless, but also to teach... With respect to His priestly office, Christ is called our ‘priest’ (Psalm 110:4), ‘the great priest over the house of God’ (Hebrews] 0:21), ‘our High Priest’ (Hebrews 3:1), ‘faithful High Priest to make propitiation for sins’ (Hebrews 2:17), ‘the great High priest’ (Hebrews 5:10), ‘the High Priest of good things to come’ (Hebrews 9: 11), ‘the Minister of the holy places and of the true Tabernacle that God has prepared’ (Hebrews 8:2), ‘our Advocate’ (1 John 2:1), ‘ransom and redemption’ (1 Timothy 2:6), ‘the Lamb of God’ (John 1:29), ‘the Lamb who was slain from the beginning of the world’ (Revelation 13:8), ‘our Passover’ (1 Corinthians 5:7), ‘the propitiation’ (Romans 3:25), ‘our Peace’ (Ephesians 2:14), etc .... Christ’s priestly office is that by which He placed Himself in the middle, between God and sinful men, reconciled the whole human race to God by completely satisfying the divine Law, by taking on Himself the penalties for sins, and by interceding before God. There are, then, two parts to this office: (1) Satisfaction, by which Christ offered an evenly balanced ransom to His Father for the sins of the whole world and acquired righteousness and life for the human race. In this satisfaction, there*

*occurred a satisfaction that was both active and passive. Active obedience consists in the completely sufficient fulfillment of the Law. Passive obedience consists in the completely sufficient payment for the sins of the human race rendered to the Father...(2) Intercession by which Christ intercedes before the heavenly Father by virtue of the merit and satisfaction that He rendered. He does this both generally for all people and even for His foes and crucifiers (Isaiah 53:12; Luke 23:34); and specifically for the faithful alone (John 17:9; Romans 8:34; 1 John 2:1). (Gerhard, On Christ, pp. 318 , 320)*

The hereditary nature of the priesthood is indicated by the specification of Aaron’s sons – **“along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.”** This reinforces the concept that the priests were chosen by God rather than by some human standard. **“Nadab and Abihu”** had also accompanied the Moses, Aaron and the elders to formalize the covenant with the Lord (Exodus 24:1). **“Nadab”** as the eldest son, would presumably have succeeded Aaron in the office of High Priest. However, he and his brother **“Abihu”** were both struck down by God for offering unauthorized fire before the Lord (Leviticus 10). They were then replaced by their younger brothers **“Eleazar and Ithamar.”** The priestly succession was renewed after Phineas, the son of Eleazar, acted decisively to put an end to Israel’s intermingling with the daughters of Moab: **“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned My anger away from the Israelites because he was as zealous as I am, for My honor among them, so that in My zeal I did not put an end to them. Therefore, tell him I am making My covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.”** (Numbers 25:10 - 13) In the days of King David the custody of the Ark was shared by two high priests, Zadok, a descendant of Eleazar and Phineas ( 1 chronicles 6:3 - 12), and Abiathar, a descendant of Ithamar and Eli. Both are mentioned as remaining loyal to David at the time of the revolt of Absalom. (2 Samuel 15:24 - 37) At the end of David’s reign, Abiathar rashly supported the claim of Adonijah but Zadok and the prophet Nathan ensured the succession of Solomon to throne upon the death of King David (1 Kings 1). Abiathar was then removed from office (1 Kings 2:35) in fulfillment of the judgment pronounced upon Eli:

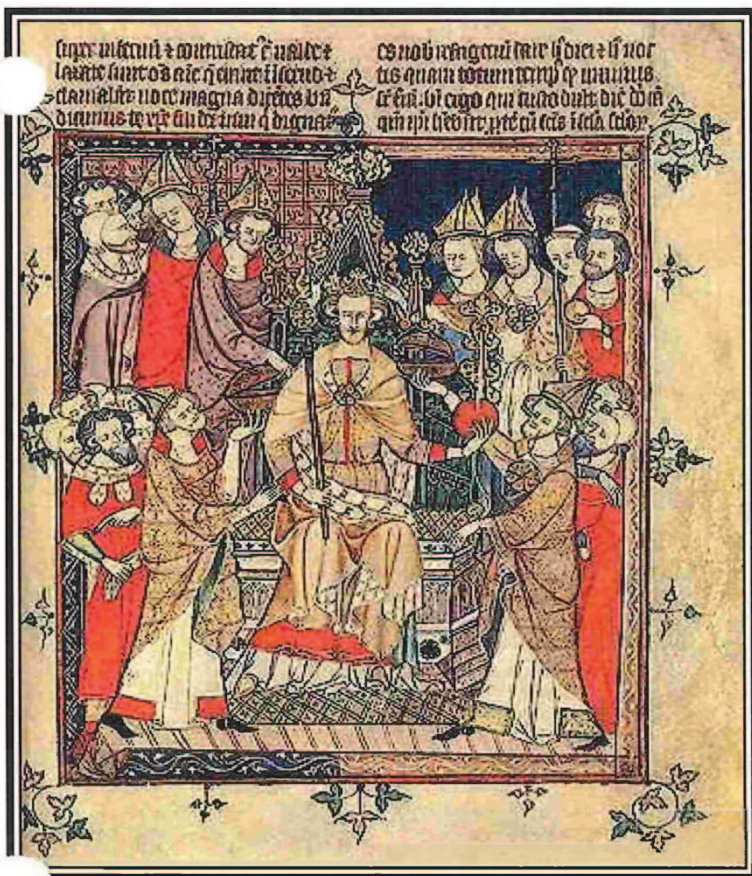


**“Christ the Heavenly High Priest  
Offering His Blood As the Atonement  
Price For Sin”**

***“I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and mind. I will firmly establish his house and he will minister before My Anointed One always. Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him for a piece of silver and a crust of bread and plead, ‘Appoint me to some priestly office, so I can have food to eat.’”*** (1 Samuel 2:35 - 36)

Zadok became the High Priest to dedicate the Temple of Solomon (1 Chronicles 29:22), and his line remained high priests throughout the history of the kingdom of Judah.

*“The triumph of Solomon meant the triumph of Zadok. His descendants became the dominant priestly family in Jerusalem. Solomon appointed one of his sons priest (1 Kings 4:2); Hezekiah’s chief priest, Azariah, was of the house of Zadok (2 Chronicles 31:10). The more Jerusalem became the center of national life, the greater was the prestige of the Zadokites. The fortunes of the Zadokites after the Exile are reflected in Ezekiel and Chronicles. In the plan for the restoration of the Temple and its worship, Ezekiel 40 - 48, the exiled Zadokites expect, as the reward for their faithfulness to Yahweh, that they alone shall perform the priestly functions in the new temple.”* (IDB, IV, p. 929)



***Medieval Illumination of Zadok - in the Vestments of a Christian Bishop – Anointing King Solomon***

The importance of the family of Zadok, and in particular their claim to the office of High Priest and control of the Temple, is reflected by the fact that the New Testament title “Sadducees” - the designation of the priestly faction in Jerusalem - was derived from the name of Zadok.

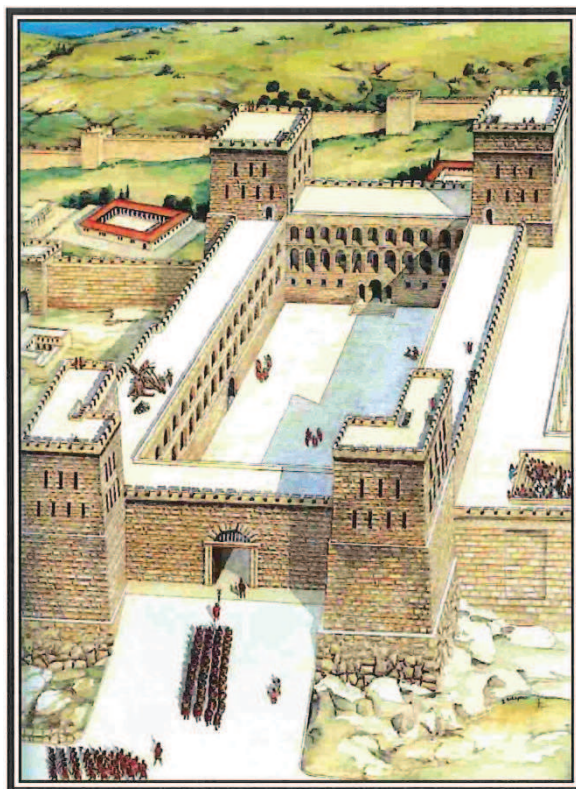
### ***Verses 2-3***

***“Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron to give him dignity and honor. Tell all the skilled men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron for his consecration, so that he may serve Me as priest.”***

***“Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron to give him dignity and honor...”*** - The profound significance of the vestments of the



High Priest cannot be over - estimated. The careful attention with which God approached the design of the priestly robes is indicative of their importance. Robes of office, or as we might express the thought today, professional dress, has been used as a basic method of conveying the dignity and importance of particular roles throughout history. The deliberately casual approach to dress which permeates modern culture unintentionally signals our rejection of any priority beyond our own personal comfort or convenience. John Durham observes that the vestments of the High Priest carry on the same theme which has been present throughout the design of the Tabernacle and its furnishings: *“The essential point of the priestly vestments is the essential point of all the instructions concerning the media of worship: Yahweh is present, and Israel must respond to that presence, be guided in that response, and be reminded constantly in that worship as in life, of the reality of the Presence and of the need for response. The vestments are double symbols; they signify priestly authority, and they signify the priestly confession of the source of that authority...Every article of the sacral vestments made the same point, each with its own specific accent: Yahweh is here, we are His, and we must both know this and show this.”* (Durham, p. 389-390) The importance of these robes of office was well understood. Josephus reported that in the days of the Roman occupation, procurator would keep the vestments of the High Priest locked in the Fortress Antonia, adjacent to the Temple. In this way, the Romans remained in firm control of the activity of the High Priest, who could not function in his official capacity without first enduring the humiliation of begging the conqueror for the release of his robes of office.



*Archaeologist's Reconstruction of the Fortress Antonia on the Northeast Corner of the Temple Mount*

*“Now on the north side of the Temple was built a citadel whose walls were square and strong, and of extraordinary firmness. This citadel was built by kings of the Asamonean race who were also high priests before Herod, and they called it the Tower, in which were repositied the vestments of the High Priest, which the High Priest only put on at the time when he was to offer sacrifice; these vestments King Herod kept in that place, and after his death they were under the power of the Romans...They were kept under the seal of the High Priest and of the treasurers of the Temple, when the treasurers, the day before a festival, went up to the Roman captain of the Temple Guards, and viewed their own seal and received the vestments, and again, when the festival was over, they brought it to the same place - and showed the captain*

*of the temple guards their seal, which corresponded with his seal and redeposited them there. And that these things were so, the afflictions which happened about them afterwards are sufficient evidence: but for the tower itself, when Herod, the king of the Jews had fortified it more firmly than before, in order to secure and guard the temple, he gratified Antonius who was his friend, and the Roman ruler, and then gave it the name, the Tower of Antonia.”*  
(Josephus, p. 335)

In the Hebrew text, these **“sacred garments”** are identified as *“the garments of holiness.”* The priest who wore the vestments is never described as *“holy.”* But the robes of his office, prepared with meticulous care, according to the design provided by God Himself, are the indication of the holiness with which this sacred office had been invested. The robes of the High Priest were to be used nowhere but in the services of the sanctuary as Aaron or one of his descendants stood before the Lord. The priests themselves remained sinful men, in need of personal forgiveness every bit as much as the people whom they represented before the Lord. But the *“holy clothes”* which had been designated for them served as a constant reminder that these ordinary men had been chosen by God, set apart and separated from their fellow Israelites, to carry out the extraordinary tasks which the Lord had entrusted to them. Henry Soltau contrasts the role of the priestly vestments for Aaron and his successors with that of Christ, the perfect fulfillment of the priestly office:

*“The garments for glory and beauty are next directed to be made, that Aaron might be consecrated to minister in the priest's office. Thus, Aaron was fitted, by reason of his garments, for this holy office. They dignified his person, covering him with a glory and beauty, which, in himself, he possessed not. To all this, the priesthood of the Lord stands out in bright and blessed contrast. The dignity and glory which are His, and which have been His from everlasting as the Son, magnify the office which He holds. His life of obedience and His death upon the tree, making Him manifest as the only begotten of the Father - full of grace and truth, proved Him to be worthy of the highest exaltation at the right hand of God; and that He had the heart of a priest, and of a good shepherd, who would care to the uttermost for the sheep of God. The office added dignity to Aaron; whereas Christ dignifies the office.”* (Soltau, p. 191)

This concept is carried on in the image of the pure white robes of righteousness which God bestowed upon those who have been justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

***“I delight in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with jewels.”*** (Isaiah 61:10)

# The High Priest



THE MITRE

THE GOLDEN CROWN

ONYX SHOULDER PIECES

THE EPHOD AND ITS GIRDLE

THE BREASTPLATE

THE BLUE ROBE

BELLS AND POMEGRANATES

THE WHITE INNER ROBE

*“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes, and elders asked me, ‘These in white robes - who are they and where did they come from?’ I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’” (Revelation 7:9,13 - 14)*

*“To give him dignity and honor”* - The text explicitly defined the function of the High Priest’s vestments in the closing phrase of Verse 2. The combination of the two terms – *“dignity and honor”* is particularly emphatic. *“Dignity”* (Hebrew – *“kabod”*) was used both in reference to God and men. In this instance, its usage suggested that as one who had been called to stand in the presence of the Lord, the raiment of the High Priest ought to reflect the splendor of God’s glory. The same word will be subsequently be used to describe the glory of God which Moses was allowed to glimpse upon Sinai (Exodus 33:18). When he returned from the mountain the prophet’s face still shined with that divine glory, and Moses found it necessary to wear a veil so as not to terrify the people (Exodus 34:33). In much the same way, the vestments of the High Priest are to reflect his encounter with the glory of God. *“Honor”* (Hebrew – *“tip’eret”*) was derived from words which described

captivating beauty, particularly to the splendid crowns of royalty. Isaiah 62:3 applied this word to the Lord's restoration of Jerusalem: *“You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.”* Jeremiah foretold the downfall of the royal house of Judah in similar terminology: *“Say to the king and to the queen mother, 'Come down from your thrones, for your glorious crowns will fall from your heads.”* (Jeremiah 13:18) Ezekiel’s poignant description of God’s love for Jerusalem as a father adorning his beloved daughter spoke of the *“beautiful crown”* which he had placed upon her head: *“I covered you with costly jewelry. I put bracelets on your arms, and a necklace Icon of Aaron in the Robes of the High Priest around your neck, and I put a ring on your With the Flowering Almond Branch and Censor nose and*



*Icon of Aaron in the Robes of the High Priest With the Flowering Almond Branch and Censor*

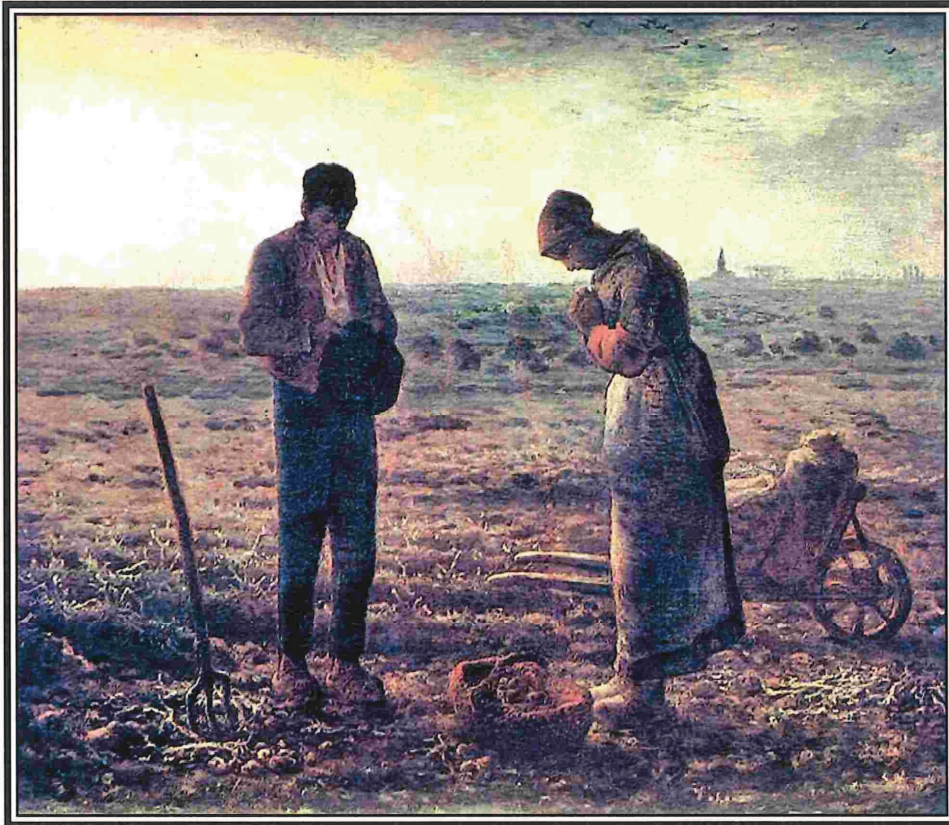
*earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head.*” (Ezekiel 16:11 - 12) Solomon spoke of the blessings of divine wisdom in a similar fashion: *“She will set a garland of grace upon your head, and adorn you with a crown of splendor.”* (Proverbs 4:10) The rabbis found in this combination of terms an affirmation of God’s ability despite His transcendent glory and ineffable splendor - to communicate with and to dwell among finite men despite our inherent limitations: *“The merger of ‘dignity’ and ‘splendor’ in the priestly vestments is the manifestation of God’s supra – infinity - His ability to express Himself in both finite and infinite terms – in a way that our limited perception can appreciate.”* (Rebbe, p. 215)

*“Tell all the skilled men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron for his consecration, so he may serve Me as priest.”* - The Lord further emphasized the special role of the priestly robes in exemplifying the nature of the priesthood by specifying the meticulous manner in which they were to be fashion by unique individuals whom He had blessed with skill for this task. The Hebrew literally described these *“skilled men whom I have given wisdom in these matters”* the *“wise of heart.”* Wisdom, from Scripture’s perspective, is not merely abstract knowledge but the ability to deal with the practical realities of life. *“The term was frequently applied to the possession of exceptional skill and talent in a specialized field.”*

(Sarna, p. 178) While arrogant modems might scorn trades or crafts which they consider menial or beneath them, the Bible celebrated craftsmanship of all kinds as blessings and gifts from God. That more accurate perspective enables the workman to take pride in his craft and carry out his job to the glory of God rather than merely putting in time, with minimum effort, in order to make the money I need to pursue personal pleasure. Every task, each in its own way, is a service to my neighbor to the glory of my God. Thus, workmanship and skill were valued more highly than income levels, whether that was the High Priest or the manual laborer in the field. For example, Isaiah celebrated the same God-given wisdom in reference to the skill of the farmer in tilling his fields.



*Greek Mosaic of Aaron in the Robes of His Priestly Office Holding Incense and the Censor*



*"The Potato Farmer's Prayer" by Millet*

*"When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil? When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cumin? Does he not plant wheat in its place and barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way. Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is a cart wheeled over cumin; caraway is beaten out with a rod and cumin with a stick. Grain must be ground to make bread, so one does not go on threshing it forever. Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it, his horses do not grind it. All this also comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom." (Isaiah 28:23 - 29)*

The practical significance of the Bible's perspective on true wisdom is most profound. Western culture, obsessed with self - promotion and satisfaction, views work as a necessary evil which must be performed in order to enjoy entertainment and recreation. This is a basic distortion of reality. One modern scholar, Rousas John Rushdooney, offered this cogent summary of the clash between the Bible's view on the meaning of work and that of contemporary society:

*"The word 'wisdom' is again important. Our modern view tends to be closer to the Greek meaning than the Biblical one. It is associated with intellectual pursuits and an academic orientation. Franklin Delano Roosevelt put together a group of professors as a 'Brain Trust' under the assumption that wise*

*counsel would be forthcoming from them. The Biblical meaning of wisdom has both the connotation of common sense and skills - artistic, inventive, mechanical, and so on. The wise man is one who relates true faith to the world of thought and action. The scribe, or Bible scholar, in Scripture, was a man of wisdom, not a palace flunky.”*  
(Rushdooney, p. 396)

True wisdom must be given by God. It cannot come from within sinful man since it directs him away from himself toward service. This phrase - **“skilled men whom I have given wisdom in these matters”** – recurs throughout the descriptions of the design and construction of the Tabernacle to describe the artisans needed to carry out the exquisite work needed for God’s dwelling place. (cf. Exodus 31:6; 35:10, 25; 36:1,2,8).

**“They are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so that he may serve me as priest.”**

The vestments which these craftsmen will create according to God’s design will serve to set Aaron apart for the role to which he has been called and designate him as the priest chosen by God Himself. The impact of these vestments upon the congregation was indicated in a detailed description of a temple service conducted by the High Priest Simon, the son of Onias, in the apocryphal book of *“Sirach,”* composed around 200 B.C.:



**“Sacred Garments to Give Him Dignity and Honor”**

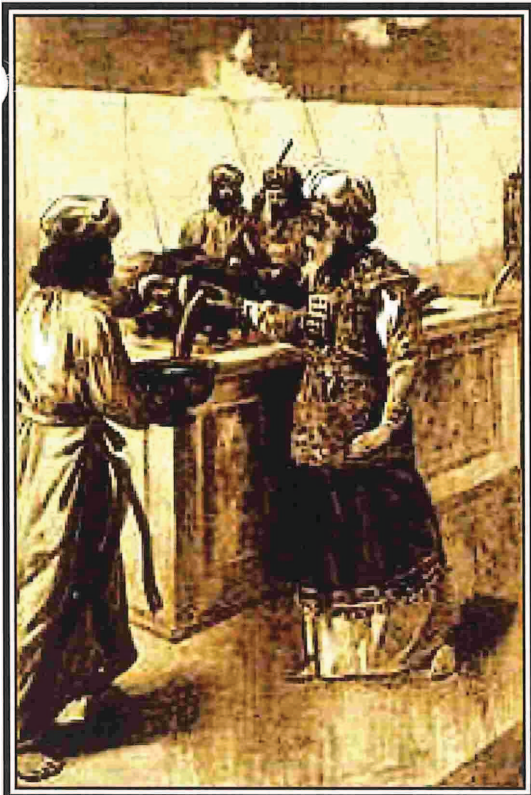
*“How glorious was he when he looked forth from the Tent and emerged from behind the Temple veil! He was like the Morning Star appearing between the clouds. Like the full moon on a festival day, like the sun shining on the Temple most high, like the rainbow gleaming in glory against the clouds, like the roses in springtime, like lilies beside a stream, like the cedars of Lebanon in summer, like burning incense, like a cup made of hammered gold decorated with all kinds of jewels, like an olive tree loaded with fruit, like a cedar tree towering into the clouds. When Simon put on his magnificent robe and went up to the holy altar, dressed in perfect splendor, he made the Temple courtyard a majestic sight. When the priests handed him the portions of the sacrifice as he stood beside the altar with his assistants circling him like a wreath, he was like a young cedar of Lebanon, surrounded by palm trees. Those who were the descendants of Aaron in their splendid garments, standing*

*before the whole assembly of Israel, holding in their hands the offering made to the Lord. When he finished the service at the altar, and had arranged the sacrifice made the Most High, the Almighty, he reached for a cup and poured out sweet smelling wine at the foot of the altar as an offering to the Most High, the Universal King. Then the priest shouted and blew their trumpets of hammered silver. They made a loud noise that the Most High would hear. All the people immediately bowed down, with their faces to the ground to worship the Lord, the Almighty, the Most High. Then the choir began to sing His praises and the most beautiful praises rang out. The people kept praying to the Lord, the Most High, until the service of worship had come to a close. Then Simon came down from the altar, raised his hands over the whole assembly of Israel, and reverently announced the blessing from the Lord, while the people bowed a second time in worship to receive the blessing from the Most High.” (Sirach 50:11 - 21)*

Aaron’s **“consecration”** would take place at the dedication of the Tabernacle. The priestly robes would play a central role in the ceremony of consecration as he and the place in which he was to serve would be set apart for the service of the Lord. The point of the **“consecration”** of Aaron and his sons, and the vestments which they had been commanded to wear was **“so that they may serve Me as priests.”**

### **Verses 4-5**

*These are the garments they are to make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so they may serve Me as priests. Have them use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen.*



*“Aaron and His Sons at the Altar of Burnt Offering in the Courtyard of the Tabernacle” – 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving*

**“These are the garments they are to make ...”** The segment opens with a summary listing of the six primary garments which were to be worn by the High Priest. Two other garments - the medallion on the front of the turban (vss. 36 - 38) and the linen undergarments (vss. 42 - 43) will be added to the description, bringing the total to eight. Each of the items mentioned in this introduction will subsequently be described in greater detail. There does not appear to be any particular significance to the order in which the garments are listed. In fact, the listing order will shift in later enumerations. Four of the garments listed in the passage are unique to the





*“The Vestments of the High Priest” – 19<sup>th</sup> Century German Bible Illustration*

vestments of the High Priest - the breastpiece, ephod, turban medallion and robe. Variations of the other four - the turban, tunic, undergarments and sash - would also be worn by the other priests, and, in fact constituted their entire raiment. Hebrew tradition distinguished between the two categories by designating those worn by all priests as the “*garments of white*” and those worn exclusively by the High Priest as the “*garments of gold.*” (Atwater, p. 60) The single exception to this pattern was the Day of Atonement, “*Yom Kippur.*” When the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, first to make expiation for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people, he set aside his splendid adornments, and wore the plain white linen of the subordinate priests. (Leviticus 16:4) The contrast is illustrated in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century German Bible print above. Bible illustrators across the centuries have by and large failed to note this distinction, as they depicted the High Priest before the Ark in his ordinary vestments. We will discuss the details of each vestment as they are further described in the forthcoming paragraphs.

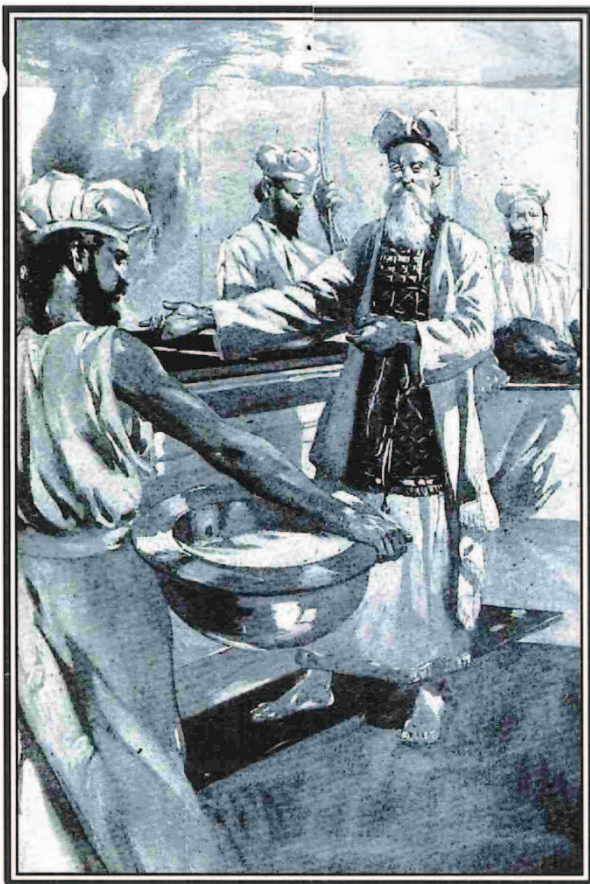
**“They are to make these sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so that they may serve Me as priests.”** - The crucial link between the vestments and the ability of “*Aaron and his sons*” to carry out their priestly responsibilities, already cited in Verse 3, is reiterated. It will recur frequently in forthcoming chapters. This repetition is deliberately designed to indelibly impress this concept on the minds of the readers. The pattern of deliberate repetition can be observed in the thirteen occurrences of the name “*Aaron*”

throughout the chapter. There was to be no doubt that the priesthood originated with and must remain linked to the man whom God himself had chosen, Aaron the brother of Moses.

***“Have them use gold, purple and scarlet yarn, an fine linen.”*** - The vestments of the High Priest were to be fashioned of the same materials from which the Tabernacle itself had been made. (Exodus 26:1) The link between the sanctuary and those who were to minister within was to be unmistakable.

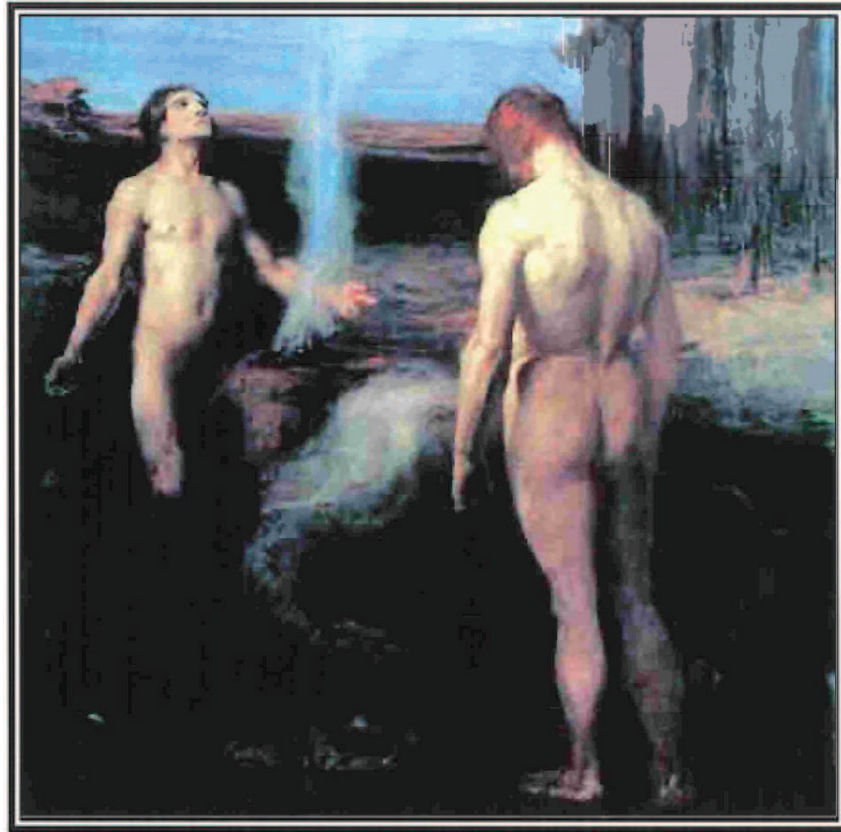
*“The contribution of the people for the clothing of the priesthood consists of the same materials as are to be used, for the innermost layer and curtains of the Tabernacle; gold and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine twisted linen. The priests are to minister within the Tabernacle, and they must reflect its status of being set apart and wholly other, even in what they wear.”* (Currid, p. 193)

In this way, the robes of the High Priest themselves will demonstrate the unique access to God which Aaron and his descendants had been granted. *“The priest is clad in the same fabrics that constitute the Tabernacle. Properly attired, he is no alien intruder when he enters the Dwelling. Rather, as the inscription on his headgear proclaims (28:36), he fully belongs to Yahweh.”* (Propp, p. 435)



***“Aaron and His Sons Preparing a Sacrifice” 19<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving***

Commentators note the distinct difference here between the priestly vestments of Israel and those of Egypt from which the Israelites had come after four hundred years. Egyptian priests were strictly forbidden to come into contact with wool of any kind. This reflects the Egyptian aversion to shepherds which resulted in Israel's settlement in the land of Goshen (Genesis 46:34). The predominant use of wool in the Tabernacle and the robes of the High Priest is indicative of the nature of the Israelites as a nation of herdsmen. The rabbis, in a characteristically mystic understanding of the text, perceived in the mixture of wool and linen the promise of a divine restoration of the harmony of the original creation. The tradition reaches back to the sacrifices of Cain and Abel in the aftermath of the Fall into sin. *“In this context, the linen is seen as the harmful influence. Wool was the offering of Abel, Adam's good son, while flax was the offering of Cain, Adam's bad son...The forces of evil generally originate in very high*



*“The Sacrifices of Cain and Abel” by Lardislaus*

*levels of holiness, but they have suffered some tragic fall. In its source, then, flax embodies and expresses a very high level of holiness. Thus, the mixture of wool and flax is permitted in the priestly vestments since in the revealed Divinity of the Tabernacle, they both expressed their spiritual source, and in their source, both are forces of holiness.” (Shumash Chemot, p. 216)*

### ***Verses 6-8***

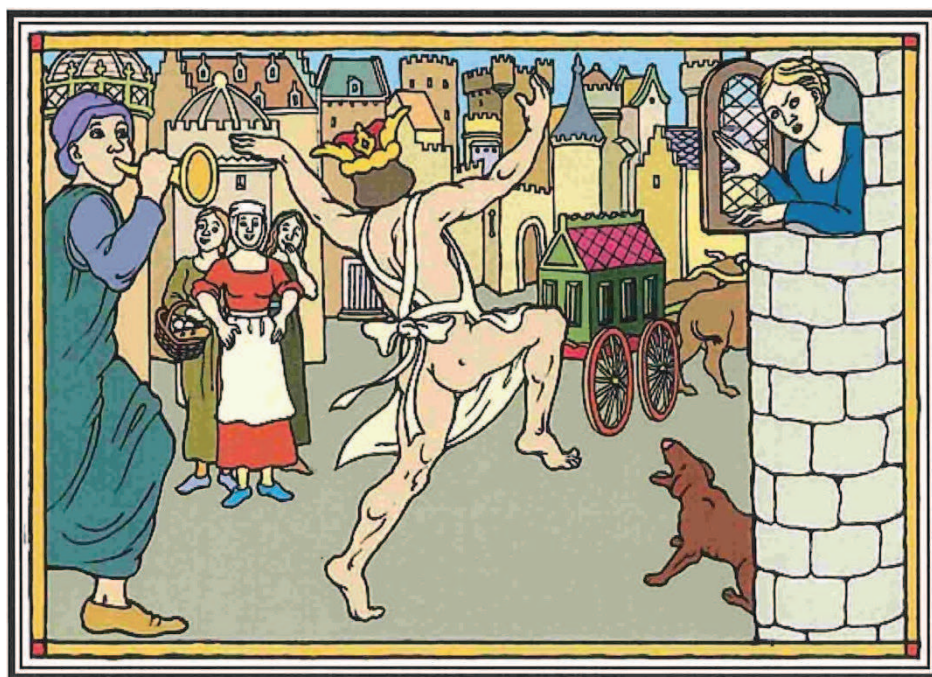
***Make the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen - the work of a skilled craftsman. It is to have two shoulder pieces attached to two of its corners, so it can be fastened. Its skillfully woven waistband is to be like it - of one piece with the ephod and made with gold, and with blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and with finely twisted linen.***

***“Make the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn ...”*** - The detailed instructions for the components of the High Priest’s robes begin with the same phrase which had been used for each of the parts of the Tabernacle and its furnishings - literally *“and they shall make.”* The linguistic parallel forms another link between the priestly vestments and the Tabernacle itself reaffirming the High Priest as the mediator who will enter the dwelling place of God on behalf of the people. The subject of the verb *“they”* refers to the artisans to whom the Lord has given the talent and ability to create these complicated garments.

**“Ephod”** is simply a transliteration of the Hebrew word, reflecting the ambiguity of the term and the variety of contexts in which it occurs in Scripture. The use of the definite article – **“the ephod”** - suggests that Moses assumed that the garment he was describing was already well-known and familiar to his readers. Cassutto argues that the use of an ephod was a common component of priestly attire throughout the region among the pagans and that therefore Moses did not need to explain or define the term:

*“It is stated here, **And they shall make the ephod**, with the definite article, just as we find the definite article in xxvii I (**And you shall make the altar**) because the ephod, like the altar, was found in one form or another, in every sanctuary, and only its design and distinctive features belonged exclusively to the Israelite shrine.” (Cassutto, p. 373)*

The comparable terms in the languages of ancient Mesopotamia refer to the costly elaborate robes of priests and kings without specifically defining their shape. The word **“ephod”** is derived from verbs which mean to gird, or to wrap around the waist, which suggests the conclusion that an ephod was originally a loin cloth or an apron. This would appear to be the sense of the term in 1 Samuel 2:18, where young Samuel was girded with a linen ephod. The same terminology is used in reference to King David when the ark of the covenant was brought to Jerusalem: **“David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the ark with all his might.”** (2 Samuel 6:14) *“It has been suggested that the words 'ephod of linen' here mean covering for nakedness' and that Samuel and David were wearing brief loincloths.”* (IDB, II, p. 118) This would explain the reproach of Mical, one of David’s wives and the daughter of Saul, who condemned her husband for disgracing the monarchy by displaying his nakedness before the people. **“How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today,**



*“David Dancing Before the Ark in a Linen Ephod” by Griffiths*



*“Gideon Attacks the Midianites”*

*disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!”* (2 Samuel 6:20) Without the qualification that an ephod is plain white linen, as in these two instances, the ephod in Scripture always relates, either properly or improperly, to the office of the High Priest.

Ephods are mentioned several other times in the Bible in connection with idolatry. Gideon used the fifty pounds of gold which he had demanded in recognition of his conquest of the Midianites to fashion an ephod of gold which he placed in Ophrah, his home village in Manasseh, east of the Jordan. Intriguingly, the wording of Gideon's request for gold – *“I do have one request, that each of you give me an earring from the plunder”* (vs. 24) – is identical to that of Aaron's request for the gold from which he built the golden calf- *“Aaron answered them, 'Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons, and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.”* (Exodus 32:4) The similarity of the gold being used to construct an idol is highlighted by the parallel. The Book of Judges sadly reports: *“All Israel prostituted themselves by worshiping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family.”* (Judges 8:27) Hebrew tradition explains this bizarre episode as Gideon's arrogant attempt to rectify the omission of the name of his tribe, Manasseh, from the breastpiece God designed for Aaron.

*“After God had favored Israel with great help through him, Gideon had an ephod made. In the high priest's breastplate Joseph was represented by Ephraim alone, not by Manasseh too. To wipe out this slight against his own*

tribe, Gideon made an ephod bearing the name of Manasseh. He consecrated it to God, but after his death Israel worshiped it as an idol." (Ginzberg, IV, p. 41)



*“Hannah's Presentation of Samuel to the High Priest Eli at Shiloh” by Ambrose Dudley*

In any case, Gideon’s action in fashioning a golden ephod constituted a repudiation of, or at very least an alternative to, the divinely ordained worship of the Aaronic High Priest at the Tabernacle in Shiloh. *“It has been noted that Gideon set up a golden ephod, quite possibly with the intention of trying to maintain the kingship of Yahweh by providing this illegitimate oracular by which Yahweh would be expected to give revelation and direction. It is remarkable that such a thing could be done in Israel by a man with whom Yahweh had conversed (Judges 6-7). The fact that Gideon's action was possible and was supported by the people indicates that the high priesthood in Israel was held in extremely low esteem in those days. Indeed, it is probably significant that the man who had been entrusted with the official ephod and the Urim and the Thummim is specifically mentioned only once in the entire book of Judges.”* (Van Dam, p. 264)

Evidently, the other tribes east of the Jordan flocked to the new worship center and eventually what had begun as an alternative way to worship Yahweh degenerated into outright idolatry. For our purpose, the episode further demonstrates the equation of the ephod with the office of high priest. A similar episode later in Judges chapters 17 and 18 tells of the idolatry of Micah and the establishment of a separate tribal cult by the men of Dan also involved an ephod as the mark of the priesthood.

*“Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some idols, and he installed one of his sons as his priest, for in those days Israel had no king and everyone did as he saw fit ... Then Micah installed the Levite and the young man became his priest and lived in his house Then six hundred men from the clan of the Danites, armed for battle set out When these men went into Micah’s house and took the ephod, the carved image and the other household gods, the priest said to them, ‘What are you doing?’ They answered him, ‘Be quiet! Don’t say a word! Come with us, and be our*

*father and priest. Isn't it better that you serve a tribe and a clan in Israel as priest, rather than just one man's household?' Then the priest was glad. He took the ephod, the other household gods, and the carved image and went along with the people.” (Judges 17:5, 11; 18:11, 18 - 20).*

The connection of the ephod with idol worship is also evident in God's warning of impending judgement upon apostate Israel to the prophet Hosea: ***“For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterwards, the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to His blessings in the last days.”*** (Hosea 3:4 - 5)

***“To wear an ephod”*** became one of the characteristic ways to describe holding the position of High Priest, as can be observed in the prophet's denunciation of the High Priest Eli's failure to control or discipline his sons. (1 Samuel 2:28). One other fascinating glimpse of the sanctity of the ephod can be seen in David's visit to Ahimelech the High Priest at the Tabernacle at Nob. David asked the priest to provide him with a weapon so that he could proceed on King Saul's business. The High Priest replied that the only weapon in the Tabernacle was the great sword of Goliath. This precious national treasure, a tribute to the victory which God had granted Israel over the Philistines, was kept with the High Priestly vestments: ***“The sword of Goliath the Philistine whom you killed in the valley of Elah is here. It is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want to take it, take it. There is no sword here but that one.”*** (1 Samuel 21:9)



***“Ahimelech the High Priest Giving the Sword of Goliath to David”  
by Aert de Gelder***

***“Make the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen - the work of a skilled craftsman.”*** - The text reasserts in specific reference to the ***“ephod”*** that which it had previously asserted in Verse 5 about the vestments in general. The ***“ephod”*** was to be fashioned of the same materials from which the tapestries and curtains of the Tabernacle were to have been fashioned. There was to be no ambiguity about the bond between the Aaronic priesthood and the dwelling place which God Himself had designated and designed. The sad divisions among the tribes which took place in the chaos of the era of the judges (described above) and the sundering of the monarchy between Israel and Judah are indicative of the Israelites willingness to allow other concerns to take precedence over the will and word of God.

The ***“ephod”*** consisted of three different elements - the garment itself, two shoulder straps adorned with gemstones bearing the names of the tribes of Israel, and an elaborately decorated sash. Chumash Shemot, a contemporary rabbinic commentary on the Book of Exodus, offers this detailed description of the ephod's make-up and design:

*“The ephod is an apron like garment designed to provide the High Priest with a superior degree of royalty and modesty, commensurate with his greater holiness. It is tied by a belt around the waist and covers the lower half of the body, in the back and partly in the front, from the waist down to the heels. The*



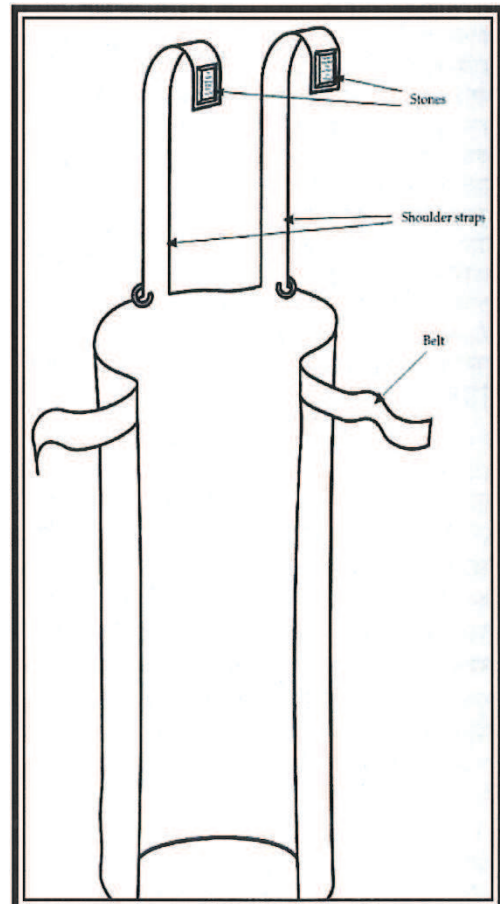
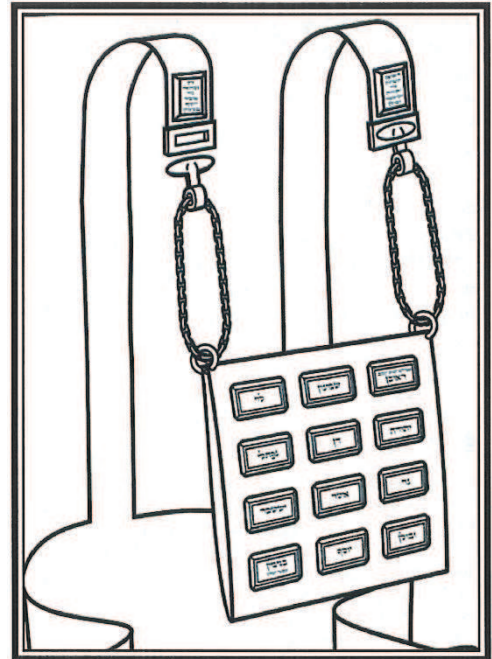
***“The High Priest Before the Sanhedrin Wearing the Ephod and Breastpiece” by Dimitri Baranoski***



artisans shall make the ephod out of threads composed of twenty-eight strands; there shall be four gold threads, one twined with six threads of turquoise wool, one twined with six threads of purple wool, one twined with six threads of scarlet wool, and one twined with six threads of twisted linen. It shall be made of a woven design, that is, with a different design on either side of the fabric.” (Chumash Shemot, p. 216)

The apron-like nature of the *“ephod”* is suggested by the etymology of the term and fully consistent with its description here in the text of Exodus. The widespread portrayal of the *“ephod”* as a jacket-like garment which extended only slightly below the waist results from a confusion of the its shoulder straps and the breastpiece which was prominently attached to them with the *“ephod”* itself. The creation of the *“ephod”* was to be reserved for the most highly *“skilled craftsmen.”* This repetition stresses both the theological significance of the garment as the distinctive vestment of the High Priest and the intricate skill required to create this exquisite beauty of the High Priest's most visible vestment.

*“It is to have two shoulder pieces attached to two of its corners, so it can be fastened.”* – *“Two shoulder pieces”* were designed to function like suspenders which would prevent the garment from slipping down below the High Priest’s waist. They were to be substantial enough not only to serve this function, but to support the pouch of the *“breastpiece”* containing the stones of the Urim and the Thummin and maintain the position of the two gemstones mounted upon the straps over the High Priest’s shoulders. The wording of the text is somewhat ambiguous as to the specific design of the shoulder straps. The point of disagreement pertains to the length of the straps. Did they extend all the way from the *“waistband”* in the back of the ephod over the priest’s shoulders to be attached to the belt in the front. In that case, the instruction that they were to be *“attached to two of its*



*Diagrams of the Traditional Rabbinic View of the Shoulder Straps and the Breastpiece of the*

*corners*” would refer either to front and back of the garment – *“corners”* being understood as sides - or to the two corners at the opening in the front of the ephod. The traditional rabbinic view contends that the straps stopped at the priest's chest where they were to be completed by the golden chains which extended above and below the breastpiece. The former view would have given the ephod more substance and maintained the position of the gemstones mounted on the High Priests shoulders. Those who prefer the latter view – that the golden chains completed the connections in the front - contend that this conclusion is supported by the description of the chains and their mounting in vss. 22-28...It is impossible to conclusively resolve the issue with the limited information provided in the text.

*“Its skillfully woven waistband is to be like it, of one piece with the ephod and made with gold, and with blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and with finely twisted linen.”* – The *“waistband”* of the ephod was to be made of the same luxurious material as the ephod itself, integral to the ephod and woven into it, rather than made separately and attached later. This arrangement would strengthen the *“waistband”* and enable it provide more coherence to the entire garment and serve as the anchor to which the *“blue cords”* and/or the *“shoulder pieces”* could be attached. This was not to be a loose sash but *“a woven corset fastened around the ephod's upper part.”* (Propp, p. 436) The *“waistband”* was intended to firmly bring the ephod to the body of the High Priest. This is clearly indicated

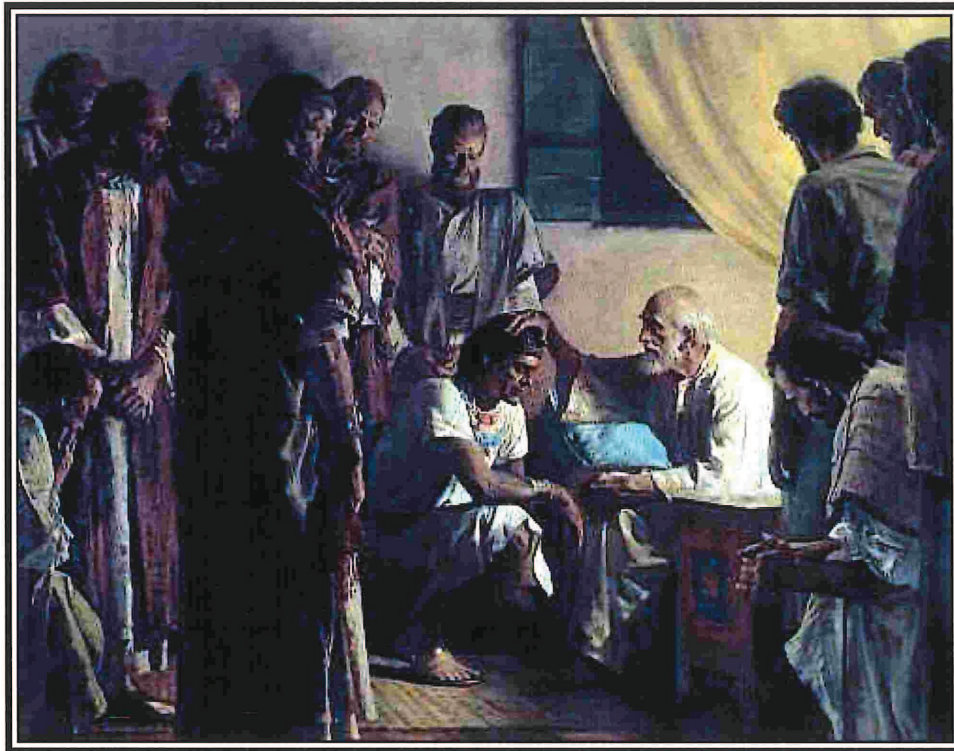
by the description of the vesting of the High Priest at the ceremony in which Aaron and his sons were ordained by Moses: *“He also tied to the ephod to him by its skillfully woven waistband; so it was fastened on him.”* (Leviticus 8:7) Once again, the colors and materials of the Tabernacle continue to predominate throughout the ephod and its various attachments.



*“Reconstruction of the Onyx Shoulder Stone Engraved With the Names of Six of the Sons of Israel”*

### *Verses 9-14*

*Take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel - in the order of their birth - six names on one stone and the remaining six on the other. Engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones the way a gem-cutter engraves a seal. Then mount the stones in gold filigree settings and fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord. Make gold filigree settings and two braided chains of pure gold, like a rope, and*



*“Jacob Blessing His Twelve Sons”*

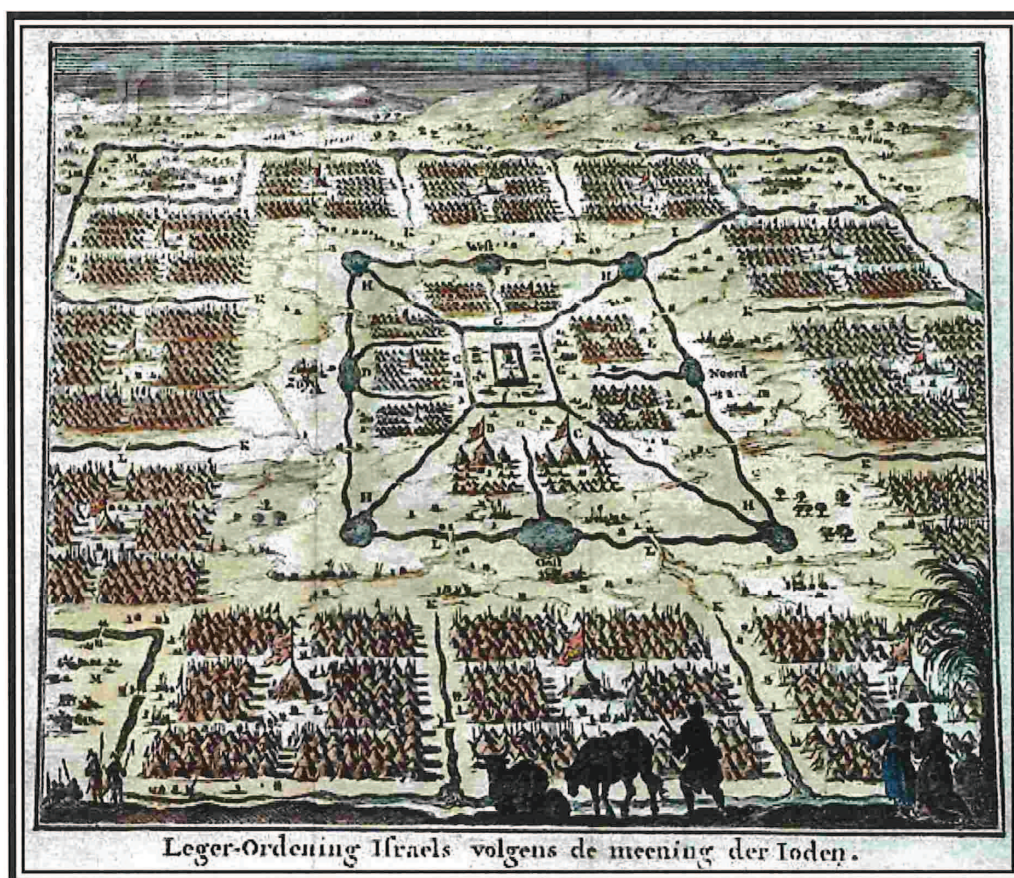
*attach the chains to the settings.*

*“Take two onyx stones...”* - The most theologically significant feature of the ephod’s *“shoulder pieces”* was *“the - two onyx stones”* which were to mounted upon the shoulders of the High Priest. *“Onyx”* is a crystalline form of quartz which comes in a broad variety of colors, often with white bands or ribbons of color flowing through the gleaming stone. Black onyx is the most popular variety of the gemstone. *“Onyx”* is a Greek word which means *“fingernail”* or *“claw.”* Greek legends tells that one day while the goddess Venus was sleeping Cupid clipped her fingernails and left the fragments scattered across the earth. Because nothing of a divine being could be destroyed Zeus transformed those fragments into the beautiful onyx stones. The text does not specify either the size or the color of the gems in the shoulder stones.

*“Engrave upon them the names of the sons of Israel - in the order of their birth”* – *“The technique of miniature engraving on precious stones was highly developed in the Near East. A gem engraving industry existed in Egypt in the period of the 18 Dynasty (16” – 14 Century B.C.E.).”* (Sarna, p. 179) There is significant variation in the order of tribal listings throughout the Torah. The birth order of Jacob’s twelve sons as compiled from the various listings in Genesis 29 - 35 is: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulon, Joseph and Benjamin (cf. Genesis 46:8 - 27; 49; Exodus 1:2 - 6; Numbers 1:5 - 15 ; Numbers 1:20 - 42). Josephus indicated that the listing began with the oldest on the High Priest’s right shoulder and continued in descending order. If that was the case, Reuben thru Naphatli would have been on the right and Gad thru Benjamin with have been on the left. The significance of the birth order listing upon the *“Stones of*

*Remembrance*” has been the topic of considerable discussion among theologians. The customary precedence of the firstborn never seems to have been a factor in the chaotic household of Jacob. Thus Joseph, at that time the youngest son, became his favorite, to be subsequently replaced by Benjamin. Neither the selection of Levi as the tribe of the priests and later Judah as the royal tribe was related to primogeniture. Douglas Stuart summarized the consensus in this way:

*“Because the Biblical text does not give us a list of the sons of Israel that is unambiguously identified as being in birth order, we cannot be certain of the actual birth order of the sons of Israel. We can, however, be sure of two things: (1) Moses and the Israelites did know that order; and, (2) it wasn’t an order that was usually regarded as important enough to use in listing of those sons, so we cannot infer from the command to list the names in order in this context that it was anything beyond a logical or natural way to list the name. In other words, no evidence exists to suggest that the birth order was the preferential order. Rather, listing the names in the birth order had no further significance than to suggest that just as Jacob’s sons were born in order to him and became ‘the sons of Israel’ (usually translated ‘the House of Israel’), so the High Priest represented the whole family of Israel in God’s presence as symbolized by the ephod shoulder stones.” (Garland, p. 608)*

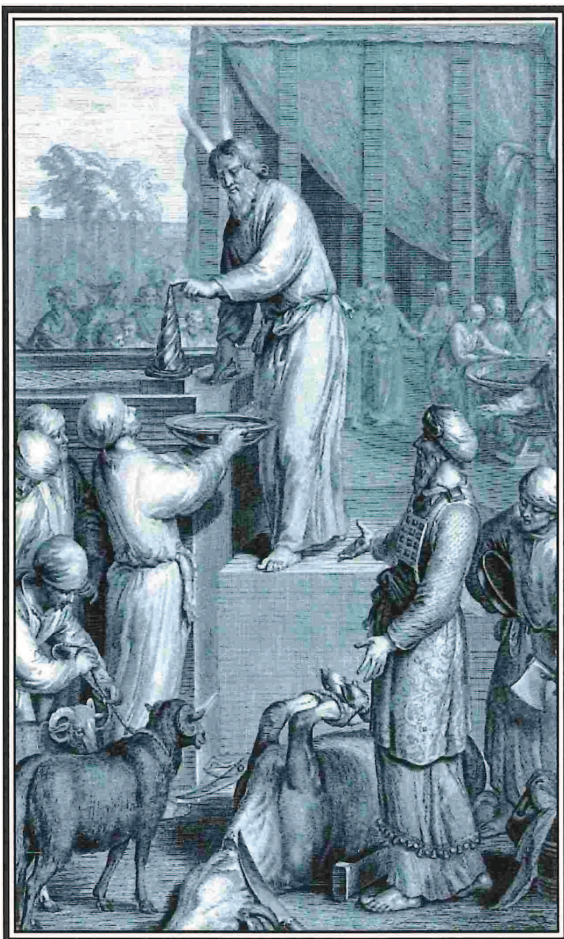


*“The Arrangement of the Twelve Tribes Around the Tabernacle in the Wilderness” – 17<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving*

The rabbis do not simply order the names of Jacob's sons chronologically but divide them first by their mothers and then by birth order. This sequence results in a listing which places twenty - five Hebrew letters on each of the two stones. The great medieval rabbi Maimonides devised this arrangement so that the six words and twenty-five letters of each of the stones would correspond to the six words and twenty-five letters in each of the two phrases of the "Shema," Judaism's basic prayer and confession of faith – ***“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.”*** (Deuteronomy 6:4)

***“Engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones the way a gem cutter engraves a seal.”*** - The engraving of the names was to be done with the precision of skill of the finest ***“gem-cutter.”*** As noted above, this craft was highly developed in the ancient Near East.

*“The names are incised on the fine letters used on gem signets, such as are frequently uncovered in excavations. Due to the hardness of the medium and the tiny scale, gem cutting is the most demanding of the scribal arts, the result is the most exquisite and durable of writing surfaces.”* (Propp, p. 437)



***“The Consecration of Aaron as High Priest”*** by Gerhard Hoet

The engraving was to have the clarity and depth characteristic of a ***“seal”*** or signet ring which was used to impress the family crest upon official documents, covenants, or contracts. The particular emphasis which the text places upon the supreme quality of this work is intended to indicate the theological significance of the two gemstones. The stones were to be carefully mounted in elaborate setting fashioned of thinly hammered gold - - ***“Then mount the stones in filagree settings.”*** The combination of their placement on the High Priest's shoulders – ***“and fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod”*** - and the exquisite workmanship of their design would insure that these onyx gems would remain one of the most prominent features of the vestments of the High Priest. But there is much more involved in the placement of the engraved onyx gems than mere prominence. Their location also conveyed profound symbolism. A man's shoulders are the most powerful and effective place for carrying a load or bearing a burden. This is precisely the meaning of the Hebrew verb which will occur in the next verse to describe placement of the tribal names on the shoulders

of the High Priest. By carrying the names of the twelve sons of Israel - the names which designated the tribes that descended from them - upon his shoulders, the priest acknowledged his acceptance of the burden of his office, representing all the people before God. He became their Mediator and offered the sacrifices on their behalf which would atone for their sins. Thus the placement of the twelve names upon the High Priest's shoulders was intended to present the people with a visual reminder of the relationship between them and the priest who represented them before the Lord.

***“As memorial stones for the sons of Israel. Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord.”*** - The engraved onyx gems are properly designated in Hebrew tradition as the *“Stones of Remembrance.”* The ***“memorial stones”*** are to be the perpetual reminder that the High Priest stands before the Lord as the representative of the tribes of Israel and an affirmation *“that in all this the God of Mercy has Israel in perpetual remembrance”* in accordance with His promise (Murphy, p. 314). The beautifully engraved gems were designed to be the badge of official authority, the divine certification of the High Priest and the role as mediator and intercessor which he had been called to carry out – ***“Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the Lord.”*** The Hebrew verb used in this phrase is correctly translated by the NIV as ***“to bear.”*** The term does not ordinarily refer to wearing a garment. In its original sense the verb literally described a father carrying his children upon his shoulders: ***“See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up My banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms, they will bear your daughters on their shoulders.”*** (Isaiah 49 :22) Scripture often pictured the heavy responsibility of high office as a burden placed upon the shoulders: ***“For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, the government will be on His shoulders.”*** (Isaiah 9:6); ***“He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the House of***



***“Aaron in the Vestments of the High Priest”***

***Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key to the House of David; what he opens, no one can shut; and what he shuts, no one can open.”*** (Isaiah 22:21 - 22; cf. 53:4) Thus, the carefully chosen language of this description presents a powerful image of the role of the High Priest, and in that way foreshadows the role of the great Messianic High Priest who was to come.

*“The most important thing about the ephod was what was written on it. Inscribed on the two stones were twelve names. These were the names of the*

sons of Jacob, later called Israel... Consider the spiritual significance of these inscriptions... When the High Priest entered the Holy Place he wore the tribal names of Israel on his shoulders. This showed that the High Priest represented the people before God... Whenever the High Priest put on his ceremonial robes, he lifted the people onto his shoulders and carried them into the presence of God. Back at Mount Sinai God had said: **“Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all the nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole earth is Mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”** (Exodus 19 – 5 - 6) These great spiritual realities - that Israel belonged to God as a treasure and was called to serve Him as a holy kingdom of priests - were symbolically reenacted every time the High Priest went before God. His clothes made a fashion statement. They said, ‘Here we are Lord, all twelve tribes of us, Your precious kingdom of priests.’... The High Priest wore these clothes when he made sacrifice for sin. God said to Aaron, **“Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering. and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people, and make atonement for them as the Lord has commanded.”** (Leviticus 9:7) As Aaron offered this sacrifice, he was carrying Israel on his shoulders, representing the people before God. Through the priestly act of this one man, atonement was made for all the sin of God's people.” (Ryken, p. 872)

**“Make gold filigree settings, and two braided chains of pure gold, like a rope, and attach the chains to the settings.”** - The **“gold filigree settings”** were to provide the connection which linked the mountings of the memorial stones to the **“two braided chains of pure gold like a rope”** which would connect to the breastpiece below. Cassutto explains that these **“settings”** were **“gold ornaments perforated by a hole through which an object can pass, the aperture being encompassed by artistic decorations.”** (Cassutto, p. 375) More plainly, the **“gold filigree settings”** were elaborately decorated golden loops to which the chains could be anchored – **“and attach the chains to the settings.”** The chains themselves were to be sufficiently strong – **“like a rope”** - to carry the burden of the **“breastpiece”** through the movements of the High Priest as he conducted his ritual responsibilities. These preliminary instructions will be subsequently detailed after the presentation of the **“breastpiece”** itself (vss. 22 - 28)



**“Reconstruction of the Breastpiece of Judgement by the Temple Institute in Jerusalem”**

## Verses 15-21

*Fashion a breastpiece for making decisions - the work of a skilled craftsman. Make it like the ephod: of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen. It is to be square, a span long and a span wide - and folded double. Then mount four rows of precious stones on it. In the first row there shall be a ruby, a topaz and a beryl; in the second row, a turquoise, a sapphire and an emerald; in the third row, a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; in the fourth row a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. Mount them in gold filagree settings. There are to be twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes.*



*“Eli and Samuel” by John Singleton Copley*

*“Fashion a breastpiece for making decisions ...”* - The Hebrew word here translated as *“breastpiece”* is of uncertain origin. It is most probably derived from either an Arabic term which means *“excellent”* or *“beautiful”* or a similar Hebrew word which means *“to store”* or *“to treasure.”* Traditional English translations as *“breastplate”* have tended to suggest a jeweled metal plate like the breastplate of a suit of armor. That is certainly not the intended sense of the text. The *“breastpiece”* was actually a richly decorated pouch woven of the same precious cloth as the ephod and the tapestries of the Tabernacle – *“Make it like the ephod, of gold, and of blue purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen.”* It is designated as *“the breastpiece for making decisions”* because - as the text will shortly specify - it served as the receptacle for the Urim and the Thummim, through which God responded to the questions of His people.

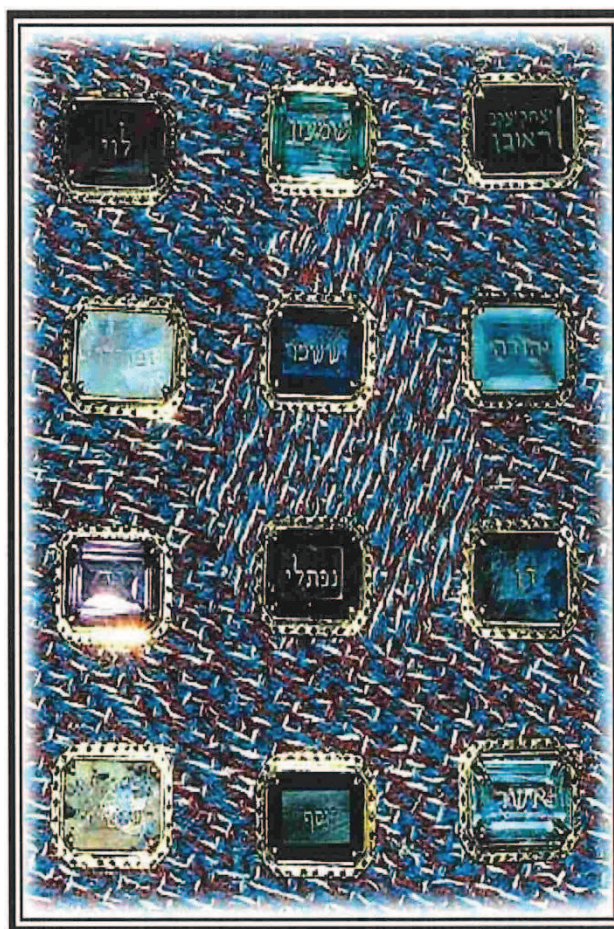
*“It is to be square, a span long and a span wide, and folded double.”* - A *“span”* is the distance between the little finger and the thumb of an outstretched hand, roughly nine inches. The wording of the Hebrew text (*“it shall be square doubled”*) indicates that these were to be the dimensions after it had been folded in half so that each panel was a nine by nine inch square. These dimensions would have covered the High Priest’s chest.

*“Although we do not know Aaron's specific size and weight, the fact that the average adult male Israelite at that time was about five feet two inches tall and weighed one hundred and thirty pounds, would suggest that the average High Priest would have this breastpiece stretched over his full chest.”* (Garland, p. 610)



**“Then mount four rows of precious stones on it.”** - The front panel of the **“breastpiece for making decisions”** was to be adorned with twelve gemstones arranged in four rows. The stones and their order on the **“breastpiece”** are specified. Unfortunately, there is no reliable way to connect the Hebrew titles in the text to any contemporary jewels. No two English translations agree. The medieval rabbi iben Ezra graphically observed that *“when it comes to identifying the gemstones ‘we all grope at the wall as if blind.’”* (Propp, p. 439) The **“Temple Institute”** in Jerusalem, an orthodox Jewish organization dedicated to preparing the temple furnishings and priestly vestments needed for the construction of the Third Temple, describes the dilemma in this way:

*“The exact conclusive identification of these stones is actually one of the most difficult and illusive of all Temple-related studies. This is because the original Hebrew names of these stones as they appear here in the Bible are extremely obscure. They are not commonly used and no description of the stones appears anywhere in the verses themselves...Faced with this sort of situation, it becomes necessary to engage in what can be called ‘linguistic sleuthing’ in an effort to arrive at a working conclusion. The names of these stones are particularly enigmatic, there are over 30 varying opinions as to the final identification of the 12 stones. These opinions include scholars and commentators from the entire historical spectrum of rabbinical literature and tradition, beginning with the most ancient – and therefore, in this case, the most reliable opinions ...It will be of great interest to the reader to learn that over the course of nearly a decade, scholars at the Temple Institute of Jerusalem have conducted intensive research into the identity of the breastplate’s stones, in an effort to reach a working conclusion that will allow the Institute’s artisans and craftsmen to actually construct a kosher breastplate which will fulfill the Biblical requirements for the stones - and thus be able to be worn by the next High Priest.”* (TI, p. 3)



**The Twelve Engraved Stones of the Breastplate of the Temple Institute In Jerusalem**

Rabbinical tradition asserts that the color of the gemstone in the breastpiece assigned to each tribe matched the color of the tribal standard. If that were indeed the case, the colors would be: Reuben - red; Simeon - green; Levi - red, white, black striped; Judah - blue/green;

Issachar - blue; Zebulon - clear; Dan - blue; Naphtali - purple; Gad - grey; Asher - blue/green; Joseph - black; Benjamin - rainbow. In any case, unless one is attempting to reconstruct the ***“breastpiece for making decisions,”*** the precise identity of each of the gems is not relevant. Nine of the twelve jewels are listed by the prophet Ezekiel as gems that were found in the perfection of Eden. As the prophet lamented the downfall of Satan and described the glorious beauty in which he was created, he declared: ***“You were in Eden, the Garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared.”*** (Ezekiel 27:13) The gem stones appear again in the final vision of Revelation as the twelve foundations of the city wall. John gazes in wonder at the heavenly New Jerusalem as he sees:

***“The wall was made of jasper and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city wall were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysolite, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst.”*** (Revelation 21:18 - 20)



***“Satan In His Original Glory”***  
by William Blake

*Israel’s tribal names on the stones permits them vicariously to enter the Holiness along with the great priest”* (Propp, p. 439)

The point of the parallel is clear. The sacrifices of the Tabernacle are part of a salvation plan that stretches from Eden to eternity. All this foreshadows the coming of the Savior Messiah, the great High Priest, who self-sacrifice on the cross will accomplish the perfect forgiveness for the sins of mankind.

Specific identifications aside, the significance of the jewels and their use here to designate the tribes is clear:

*“Precious lustrous gems have betoken authority and beauty. They are associated in particular with heaven and God’s presence (24:10; Isaiah 54:12; Ezekiel 1:16,26; 10:1,9; 28:13 - 14,16; Daniel 10:6; Revelation 4:3; 21:18 - 21). Their purpose here is to dignify the priest in the people’s eyes, to make him like a heavenly being, worthy to serve Yahweh. The inscription of*

**“Mount them in gold filigree settings.”** - Each of the stones was to be set in the same intricate gold mount which surrounded to two gems on the shoulders of the High Priest. These gold settings were then to be woven into the lustrous cloth from which the **“breastpiece for making decisions”** was made.

**“There are to be twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes.”** – *“Repetitio mater Scientia”* – *“Repetition is the mother of learning.”* The twelve tribes had already appeared on the shoulders of the High Priest as memorials of his role as intercessor and mediator. Now they appear again, even more prominently, to designate Aaron and his descendants as the representatives of the nation. The concept of the High Priest as a mediator between God and the Israelites is well-expressed in the Latin term *“pontifex.”*

The chief priest of pagan Rome was designated as the *“pontifex maximus”* – *“the greatest bridge builder.”* That ancient Latin title remains among the official designations of the pope. Rabbinic tradition taught that the names of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were added to the first gemstone and the phrase *“all these are the tribes of Jeshurun”* (a Hebrew variation of the name Israel). The purpose of these additions was to include every letter in the Hebrew alphabet on the twelve stones. This was necessary because of the rabbis' opinion that the Urim and the Thummin functioned by spelling out the answers to the questions posed by illuminating different jewels on the **“breastpiece.”**

The most fascinating Talmudic legend in reference to the **“breastpiece”** pertains to the miraculous manner in which the gems were engraved. The agent of this miracle was a tiny wormlike creature called the *“Shamir.”* The legend says that the Shamir was created along with ten other wondrous things all of which would play a role in the history of the nation of Israel at twilight of the sixth day on the eve of the first Sabbath. These wonders included the mouth of the earth, the mouth of the well, the mouth of the she-ass, the rainbow, the manna, the staff of Moses, the Shamir, the two tablets of stone, the letters of the alphabet, and the stylus for writing:



**“Aaron High Priest of Israel” by Pier Mola**

*“The Mishnah lists these items that later took on an important role in Jewish lore. The mouth of the earth is the place where the earth opened and swallowed up Korah and his followers (Numbers 22:28). The well is the one that God gave to the people in the wilderness (Numbers 21: 16 - 18). The she - ass is that of Balaam which spoke (Numbers 22:28). The rainbow is that of Noah (Genesis 9:23). The manna is that given to the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 16:15). The staff or rod of Moses is found in Exodus 4:17. The tablets are the first tablets given to Moses (Exodus 32:15).” (Schwartz, p. 77)*

To the ancient teachers, it was profoundly significant that God unique bond with Israel was already planned at the time of creation and that these wondrous articles would have been created on the eve of the first Sabbath Day. The Shamir is included in this category because of its miraculous role in the preparation of the High Priest's vestments and the Temple of Solomon. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* reports the nature and origin of this remarkable creature:

*“The Shamir was the seventh of the ten marvels created in the evening twilight of the first Friday, and it was followed, significantly enough, by the creation of writing, the stylus, and the two tablets of stone. Its size was that of a grain of barley. Nothing was sufficiently hard to withstand it. When it was placed on stones they split in the manner in which a book opens; and iron was broken by its mere presence”.* (JE, XI, p. 229)

The sages of Judaism understood the phrase **“engraved like a seal”** in reference to both the two shoulder stones and the gems of the breastplate to require that the words were not to be etched with any sort of tool and that not even the tiniest fragment of the sacred jewels could be lost. Each gem had to be maintained *“in their fulness.”* To resolve this dilemma, God provided the craftsmen of Israel with the *“Shamir.”* *“It is taught that Moses himself used the Shamir for the stones of the original ephod and breastplate while yet in the desert, for the Tabernacle. Initially the words were written on the stones in ink. Then the stones are simply exposed to the Shamir, and the letters are cut into the stones automatically, of their own accord, like a fig which ripens and splits open in the summer; it splits open, yet no part of it is missing, and a valley splits open in the rainy season, and yet it too lacks nothing - thus the stones*



*“The Breastpiece of the High Priest”  
19” Century Bible Engraving*

remained 'in their fullness.'" (Temple Institute Priestly Garments, pp. 3 - 4) It is said that the Shamir was also used by King Solomon in the construction of the Temple, but that the wondrous creature ceased to exist after the Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonian armies of Nebuchadnezzar.

### Verses 22 - 28

*For the breastpiece make braided chains of pure gold like a rope. Make two gold rings for it and fasten them to two corners of the breastpiece. Fasten the two gold chains to the rings at the corners of the breastpiece, and the other ends of the chains to the two settings, attaching them to the shoulder pieces of the ephod at the front. Make two gold rings and attach them to the other two corners of the breastpiece on the inside edge next to the ephod. Make two more gold rings and attach them to the bottom of the shoulder pieces on the front of the ephod, close to the seam, just above the waistband of the ephod. The rings of the breastpiece are to be tied to the rings of the breastpiece with blue cord, connecting it to the waistband, so that the breastpiece will not swing out from the ephod.*



*The Aaronic Benediction*

*“For the breastpiece make braided chains of pure gold ...”* - The instructions for securing the breastpiece to the shoulder straps and the waistband of the ephod were carefully detailed. The fastening rings and chains were to be made from *“pure gold”* so that they could not only serve the practical purpose for which they had been designed but would actually enhance the appearance of the *“breastpiece”* and draw attention to it. The stout *“braided chains of pure gold like a rope”* linked the pouch to the shoulder straps above and carried the weight of the *“breastpiece.”* The lower two corners of the *“breastpiece”* were secured to the waistband of the ephod with blue cord to prevent the pouch from flapping away from the High Priest’s body. The *“blue cord”* was used on the lower corners because they did not bear the weight of the *“breastpiece”* and therefore did not need to be as strong as the chains above. Their greater flexibility would also have been a practical advantage, given their location around the High Priest's waist.

### Verses 29 - 30

*Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place he will wear the names of the sons of Israel on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing memorial before the Lord. Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so that they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the Lord. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord.*



*“The Marriage of the Virgin” by Jerome Langlois*



*“Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh” (Both Figures Presented As They Would Be After Sinai) - The Master of the Dinteville Allegory*

***“Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place he will wear the names of the sons of Israel...”*** - The twelve gems of the ***“breastpiece”*** reinforce the message of the twelve names inscribed upon the onyx shoulder stones. The High Priest is the personification of the Children of Israel. He stands before the Lord on their behalf. The sacrifices of atonement and the rituals which he performs are for their benefit. The repetition of the phrase ***“over Aaron’s heart”*** signals the importance of the concept.

*“The breast piece was a memorial for the high priest who wore it close to his heart as he interceded for God’s people...This draws attention to Israel’s place near the high priest’s heart. It was his responsibility not only to bear the people’s burdens on his shoulders, but also to have their interests at heart. The heart is the center of the person, the seat of love and affection. And it was there that the people of God were tied to their high priest. They were bound to him with cords of love and affection, the ways the stones on his breastpiece were tied to the ephod, close to his heart.”* (Ryken, p. 880)



***“The High Priest Within the Holy Place” – 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving***

***“Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece...”*** - The breastplate of the High Priest is identified as ***“the breastpiece for making decisions”*** and ***“the breastpiece of judgement”*** because of the fact that it was the receptacle for ***“the Urim and the Thummim.”*** Most English Bible translations simply transliterate these two Hebrew words because of the obscurity of their specific meaning in this context. Both nouns are plural which could suggest that they are both multiple objects. They would literally be translated as ***“the lights and the perfections”*** ***“Urim”*** is derived from a root which means ***“to shine”*** or ***“to enlighten.”*** ***“Thummim”*** means ***“to complete”*** or ***“to fulfill.”*** Some scholars contend that the two terms should be understood together as an expression of ***“perfect enlightenment.”*** Whatever the preferred specific translation may be the thrust of the words is to affirm the capacity of ***“the Urim and the Thummim”*** to serve as a means of divine revelation and the reliability of that revelation. The use of the definite article ***“the”*** in reference to the nouns and the instruction to ***“put”*** them inside the ***“breastpiece”*** - rather than giving directions as to how they were to be made – clearly indicates that these were pre-existing familiar items which were now to be entrusted to the High Priest. However, in the absence of any Scriptural reference to ***“the Urim and the Thummim”*** prior to this text, it is impossible to determine the timing or circumstances of their origin. Numerous theories have been advanced but all are necessarily speculative.

*“One is left with the complete silence of the manufacture of the Urim and the Thummim in Exodus 28 and 39...All things considered the most plausible explanation of this silence is that unlike everything else that is mentioned the Urim and the Thummim did not have to be made because Israel already had the Urim and the Thummim in their possession. The use of the definite article with the Urim and the Thummim in Exodus 28:30 also points in this direction. This oracular means was apparently well known to everyone and therefore needed no explanation...The Urim and the Thummim obviously predated the theophany at Sinai and were a very old means of revelation...In summary, there are many uncertainties and little is sure...The inclusion of the Urim and the Thummim into the breastpiece of Aaron when he was ordained as High Priest (Leviticus 8:8) could therefore signal the official incorporation of an ancient means of revelation into the official cult.” (Van Dam, p. 236)*



*“Aaron In the High Priest in His Robes of Office” – 18<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving*

The nature of **“the Urim and the Thummin”** and the manner in which they were used to reveal the will of God have also been the subject of ongoing debate. Biblical references to the use of **“the Urim and the Thummim”** do not allow for a conclusive identification or definition of their method. When Joshua was consecrated as the nation’s leader, God commanded that the ceremony was to be performed by Eleazar the High Priest because of the role he would play seeking guidance from the Lord as the keeper of **“the Urim and the Thummim:”** **“He is to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by enquiring of the Urim before the Lord.”** (Numbers 27:21) **“The Urim and the Thummim”** also figure prominently in Moses’ comment’s about the tribe of Levi in his farewell blessing of the tribes of Israel. The custody of **“the Urim and the Thummim”** is the foremost blessing listed among all the honors which God has bestowed upon the priests:

**“About Levi he said: ‘Your Thummim and Urim belong to the man You favored....He teaches Your precepts to Jacob and Your Law to Israel. He offers incense before You and whole burnt offerings on Your altar. Bless all his skills, O Lord, and be pleased with the work of his hands.’”**  
(Deuteronomy 33:8 - 11)



We catch an intriguing glimpse of *“the Urim and the Thummim”* at work in 1 Samuel 14. Saul was preparing to go into battle with the Philistines. He summoned Ahijah, the High Priest and instructed him to *“bring the ephod.”* *“Saul said to Ahijah, ‘Bring the ephod’ (At that time he wore the ephod before the Israelites.)”* (vs. 18) As the King and the High Priest sought the will of God through the Urim and the Thummim, chaos broke out in the Philistine camp. If Israel was going to attack, it had to do so immediately: *“While Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the Philistine camp increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, ‘Withdraw your hand.’”* (vs. 19) It would appear that as Ahijah was reaching into the breastpiece for the Urim and Thummim, Saul made the decision to attack and stopped him. Later in the chapter, King Saul asked the Lord whether to continue the attack but because of his earlier impetuosity he received no reply: *“But the priest said, ‘Let us inquire of God here’ So Saul asked God, ‘Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You give them into Israel's hand?’ But God did not answer him that day.”* (vss. 36 - 37) Then Saul prayed to the Lord for help in identifying those who had broken his oath that the warriors would fast until their enemies were destroyed and complained about the failure of the Urim and Thummim and specifies the manner of God’s response: *“Then Saul prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel: ‘Why have You not answered Your servant today? If the fault is in me or in my son Jonathon, respond with the Urim, but if the men of Israel are at fault, respond with the Thummim.’”* (vs. 41:41) Saul’s procedure would have eliminated the possibility of non - response and was most probably designed to do so. Evidently, the High Priest declined to participate in the King’s presumption for the text reports that the decision was made by simply casting lots. When David was fleeing the army of Saul, he also asked the High Priest Abiathar *“to bring the ephod”*:

*“When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar, the priest, ‘Bring the ephod’ And David said, ‘O Lord God of Israel, your servant has heard that Saul definitely plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. Will the citizens of Keilan surrender me to him? Will Saul come down as your servant has heard? O Lord god of Israel, tell Your servant.’ And the Lord said, ‘He will.’ Again David asked, ‘Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?’ And the Lord said, ‘They will.’”* (1 Samuel 23 9 - 12)

At the tragic end of his reign, the Lord would not respond to King Saul’s pleas for guidance. The desperate ruler then sought out the witch of Endor: *“When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He enquired of the Lord, but*



*“King Saul and the Witch of Endor” by James Tissot*

*the Lord did not answer him by dreams, or Urim or prophets.”* (I Samuel 28 :5 - 6)

All of this indicates the prevalence of the Urim and Thummim in the early monarchy. However, there is no further record of their use after the time of David. The only text which refers directly to them notes their absence. When the exiles could not determine who was eligible to be priests, it was decided that they would await the return of the Urim and Thummim so that God could make the decision: ***“The governor ordered them not to eat***



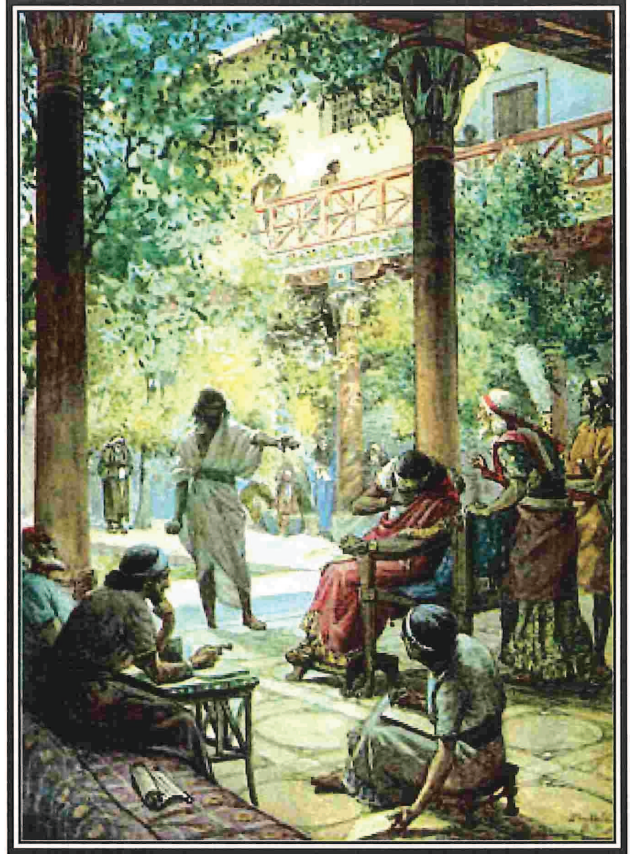
*“King Saul and the Witch of Endor” by Martynov*

***any of the most sacred food, until there was a priest ministering with the Urim and the Thummim.”*** (Ezra 2:63) Nahum Sama summed up the evidence within the traditions of Judaism in this way:

*“This mode of discovering the divine will never appears beyond the Davidic age. Ezra 2:62, cited above, implies that it was not available in the early Second Temple times. Josephus reports that it had ceased to operated two hundred years before his time, in the days of the Hasmonean High Priest John Hyrcanus (135 - 104 B.C.E.). Mishnah Sotah 9:12 relates that ‘with the death of the first prophets the Urim and the Thummim ceased’; but it is unclear precisely to which period this refers. Yoma 21b claims that they were present in the Second Temple but did not function as before.”* (Sarna, p. 182)

Cornelius Van Dam, author of the most comprehensive modern study of the subject, *The*

*Urim and the Tummim - A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel*, (1997), contends that the disappearance of this means of divine communication was the result of a combination of factors. As the monarchy became more firmly established the royal court in Israel tended to take on the trappings of traditional governments with advisors and counselors who became the king's basic sources of guidance, rather than the High Priest. The accumulation of a growing canon of prophetic writing, the Torah and the books which followed it gradually transformed Judaism into a religion of the Book rather than seeking immediate divine guidance. At the same time, the corruption and unfaithfulness of the office of High Priest and the priesthood in general resulted in a steady decline in the respect and honor accorded the priests. They came to be viewed as self - serving institutional bureaucrats rather than faithful servants of the Lord. While the priesthood declined in status, the increasing prominence of the prophets as the primary spokesman for the Lord within Israelite society, eclipsed the role which had traditionally been occupied by the descendants of Aaron. These tensions were exacerbated by the rise of the synagogue and the Pharisees and the diaspora as the result of the various conquests and captivities.

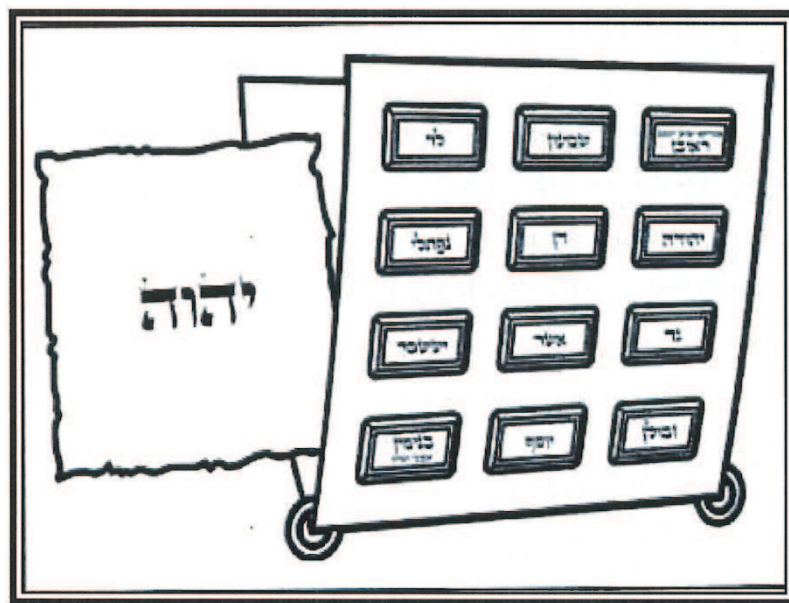


*“The Prophet Nathan Denouncing the Sin of King David” by William Mole*

Within Judaism, the traditional view is that the *“Urim and the Tummim”* were a parchment with the sacred name or names of God inscribed upon it. This parchment was placed within the breastpiece - which formed a folder with open sides, not a pouch - and when a question was posed by the High Priest it would cause the letters inscribed on the gemstones to light up in sequence, spelling out the answer to the question. This view was based upon the meaning of the terms *“Urim”* – *“to shine”* and *“Thummim”* – *“to complete.”*

*“In his commentary on Exodus 28:30, Rashi (1040 - 1105) considers the Urim and the Tummim to have been an inscription of the Name (YHWH) that was placed between the front and the back of the doubled material forming the breastpiece by which the breastpiece illuminated its words (Urim) and fulfilled its promises (Thummim)...Ramban or Maimonides (1194 - 1270), in his commentary on Exodus 12:30, agreed with Rashi’s suggestion that the Urim and the Thummim were an inscription of the Name placed in the breastpiece. He went further than Rashi, however, by suggesting that they*

were an inscription of the holy names of God of heavenly origin, given by God to Moses, so that when the priest fixed his thoughts on the divine name in the Urim, some letters engraving on the stones of the breastpiece would light up before the eyes of the priest who inquired of their judgement. Not yet knowing the correct arrangement of the letters to form the response, the priest would fix his thoughts on the divine names in the Thummim, and his heart was made perfect so that he could understand the meaning of the letters that had lit up.” (Van Dam, p. 24)



*“The Insertion of the Sacred Name Into the Breastpiece”*

*The Jewish Encyclopedia* published in 1912, offered a detailed description of the manner in which **“the Urim and the Thummim”** were used and noted that the High Priest to whom the question was submitted had to be a righteous man *“upon whom the Shekinah rested.”*

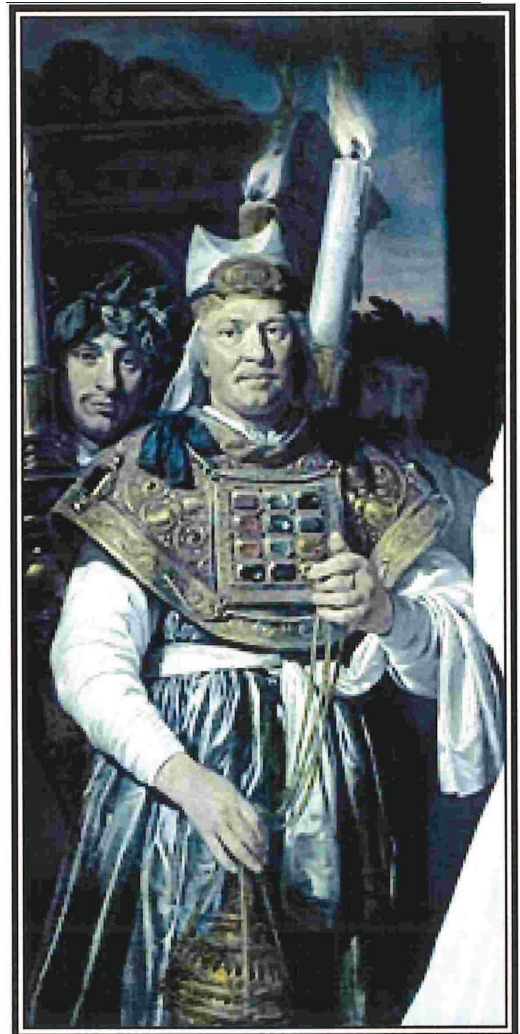
*“The oracle was consulted in the following manner: The High Priest donned his eight garments, and the person for whom he sought an answer stood facing him, while he himself turned toward God (the Shekinah). It was necessary that the question should be brief and that it should be pronounced, but not aloud; while the answer was a repetition of the query, either in the affirmative or the negative. Only one question might be asked at a time. If more than one were put, the first alone received a reply. The answer was given by the letters of the names of the tribes which were engraved upon the High Priest’s breastplate. If the question were not distinctly worded, the question might be misunderstood, as in Judges 20:18. A decision by the oracle might be demanded only by the king, or by the chief of the highest court, or by a prominent man within the community, such as a general of the army, and it might be sought only for the common welfare of the nation. It was necessary*

*that the High Priest who questioned the oracle should be a man upon whom the Shekinah rested. The characteristic feature of the Shekinah was radiance; and Josephus...states that the oracles were revealed through rays of light.”* (JE, XII, p. 386)

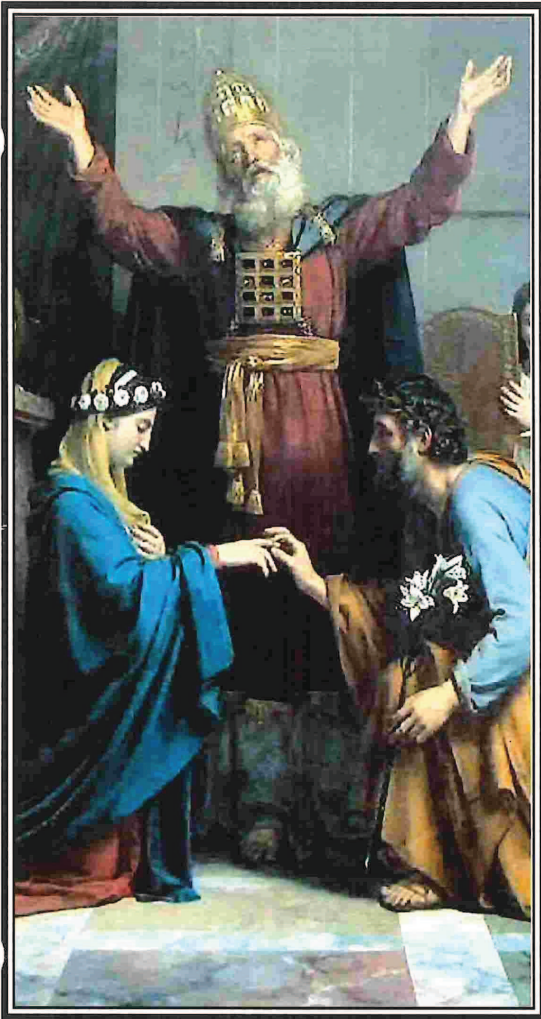
The majority view among Bible scholars in recent centuries is that ***“the Urim and the Thummim”*** were stones or gems stored within the pouch of the breastpiece. Some suggest that they were two stones of different colors, light and dark. When confronted with a question, the High Priest would reach inside the breastpiece and withdraw one of the stones. If it was the white stone the answer to the question was yes. If it was the dark stone the answer was no. Others argue for an indefinite number of stones which may have been inscribed in some manner. These stones would be cast upon the ground and the manner in which they landed would then be interpreted by the High Priest to provide the answer to the question which had been posed. Proponents of this view cite Proverbs 16:33 in favor of their position: ***“The lot is cast for in the fold, but its every decision is from the Lord.”*** Cassutto summarizes the traditional view under four points:

*“1. That permission to enquire of the Lord by means of the Urim and the Thummim in the pouch of the Ephod was granted only to the person standing at the head of the people and only on matters of public concern; 2. That the inquiry related to matters that human beings could not possibly know; for instance, an issue dependent on the conscience of an individual or something belonging to the future; 3. That the question had to be formulated as to make only one of two answers possible: yes or no; the first matter or the second; 4. That two or more inquiries could not be made simultaneously; the answer was given to one question only; 5. That the reply was given by lot, as the expressions ‘casting’ and ‘taking’ indicate; this was based on the belief that the lot was not a matter of chance, but that God made His judgement known thereby, namely His decision or verdict.”* (Cassutto, p. 380)

***“So that they may be over Aaron’s heart whenever he enters the presence of the Lord.”*** - Like the stones of the twelve tribes (vs. 29), ***“the Urim and the Thummim”*** are deliberately placed ***“over Aaron’s heart”*** whenever he is carrying out the responsibilities of his office in ***“the presence of the Lord.”*** In this



*“The High Priest Leading the Ark” by Jan DeBray*



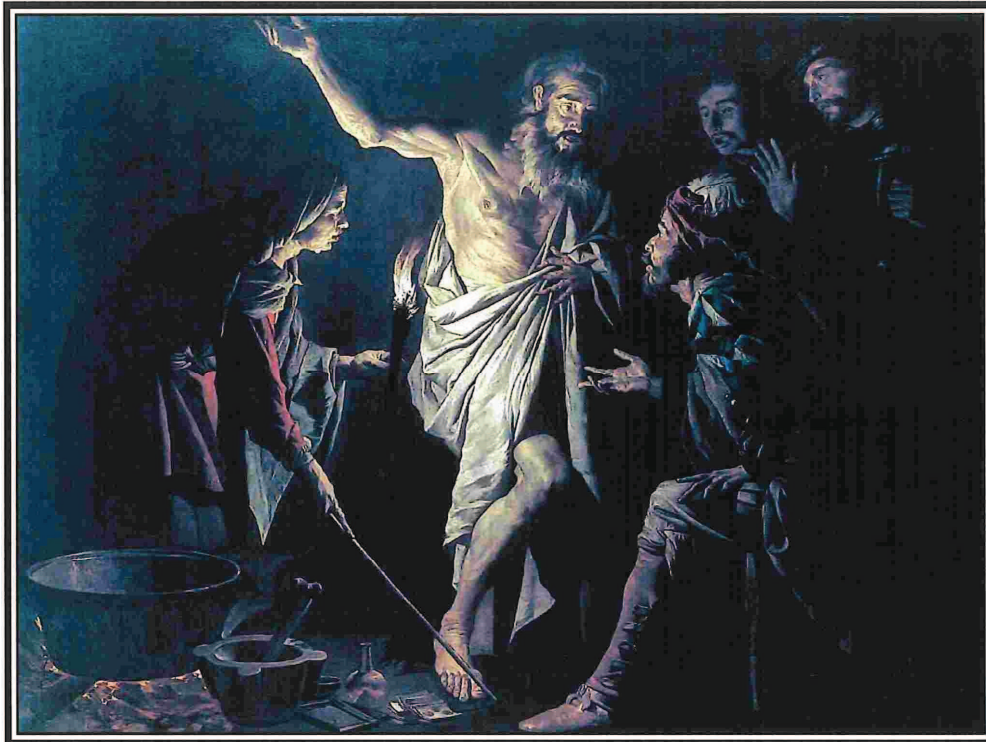
*"The Breastplate of the High Priest"  
(Detail from "The Marriage of the  
Virgin" by Russo)*

way, both the High Priest and the people would be constantly reminded of the capability which God had entrusted to His High Priest to reveal the Lord's purpose for the future in moments of national crisis. The High Priest was to be ever mindful of the gift with which he had been blessed and the responsibility which accompanied that gift. The image of a message engraved upon the heart is common in the Old Testament for important concepts which must never be forgotten. *"My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. Keep my commands and you will live, guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers and write them on the tablet of your heart."* (Proverbs 7:1 - 3) *"Judah's sin is engraved with an iron tool, inscribed with a flint point on the tablets of their heart and on the horns of their altars. Even their children remember their altars and their Asherah poles, beside the spreading trees and on the high hills."* (Jeremiah 17:1 - 2) *"These commands that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home, and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."* (Deuteronomy 6:6 - 7)

The institution of *"the Urim and the Thummim"* stands in stark contrast to the absolute prohibition of divination which God imposed upon the Children of Israel. Deuteronomy 18 rejected all of *"the detestable ways"* of the Canaanites, prominent among which were magical rites and ceremonies to foretell the future:

*"When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist, or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, and because of these detestable practices, the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you."* (Deuteronomy 18:9 - 12)

All pagan magic was based upon the conviction that the proper spells, incantations, and



*“Saul and the Witch of Endor” by Matthias Stom – 1635*

rituals could control the gods and compel them to disclose or influence future events. The application of such nonsense to the true God was blasphemy or the crassest sort. The use of *“the Urim and the Thummim”* do not fall within this category because they had been instituted by God Himself. The power did not rest in the objects, or their proper use within a specified ritual, but was the result of God’s gracious promise. Furthermore, as noted in our review of their use, they did not automatically or always work, as God reserved the sovereign right not to respond if He so chose.

*“Yahweh had revealed Himself to Israel as a faithful covenant God who communicated His will to His people when necessary and who provided ways for Israel to inquire of Him...Unlike the gods of Israel’s neighbors, Yahweh stood above creation as was not to be controlled in any way. Furthermore, the autonomous system of omens in pagan divination presupposed the functioning of a type of fate or destiny. This view was completely alien to Yahweh’s guiding history to His goal.” (Van Dam, p. 125)*

In what must be viewed as one of history’s most bizarre distortions of Biblical theology, *“the Urim and the Thummim”* came to play a crucial role in the fantasies and falsehoods of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism. In the Mormon view the Urim and Thummin were supernatural translation devices whose foremost use was the translation of the Book of Mormon. Smith had been an active participant in the occult fads of searching for ancient civilizations which had once flourished in North America and using magical *“peek stones”* to locate their buried treasures. But all that changed, Smith told his friends and followers,



*“The Angel Moroni Leading Joseph Smith to the Golden Tablets of the Book of Mormon and the Crystal Spectacles of the Urim and the Thummim”*

on the evening of September 21, 1823, when he was visited by a messenger from God, the angel Moroni, who informed him that he had been chosen to be the latter day prophet of the Lord and to reveal the truth about Jesus Christ, which had long been obscured and contradicted by historic Christianity which was an abomination in God’s sight. Smith reported that the angel promised to lead him to an inspired record etched upon golden tablets which would tell the real story of God and His dealings with mankind. He also assured Smith the he would provide a pair of magic spectacles, *“the Urim and the Thummim”* which would enable Smith to translate the *“reformed Egyptian”* hieroglyphs of the original text into English. At least, that is the final version of Joseph Smith’s alleged encounter with the angel and the Urim and Thummim, which was not finalized until five years after he was supposed to have found them and three years after the initial publication of the Book of Mormon. In his earlier accounts of the discovery it was his magic *“peek stone”* or *“seeing stone”* which had led him to the golden tablets. Joseph’s ultimately described his discovery in this way: *“With the records was found a curious instrument which the ancients called ‘Urim and Thummim,’ which*

*consisted of two transparent stones, set in the rim of a bow, fastened to a breastplate.”* (Persuitte, p. 220) The tablets were uncovered in 1827 and then hidden away in *“a rotten birch tree”* in the woods near his home. The work of *“translating”* them began soon after without the tablets themselves present. The first scribe to record Joseph Smith dictated words was his wife, Emma Hale Smith. She was later replaced by Martin Harris. Smith would sit behind a blanket on one side of the room and Smith would write down the words he called out from behind the blanket. After 116 pages of the manuscript had been produced, Harris took them home to show his wife who lost or destroyed the pages. Smith was punished for his carelessness by having his translation privileges revoked for a few months. Contemporary accounts of the process by Smith’s friends and relatives do not mention the magic spectacles or the Urim and Thummim. Instead, the self-proclaimed prophet used a peek stone which he had found in a well some years earlier and had used in his previous career as a magical money - digger:

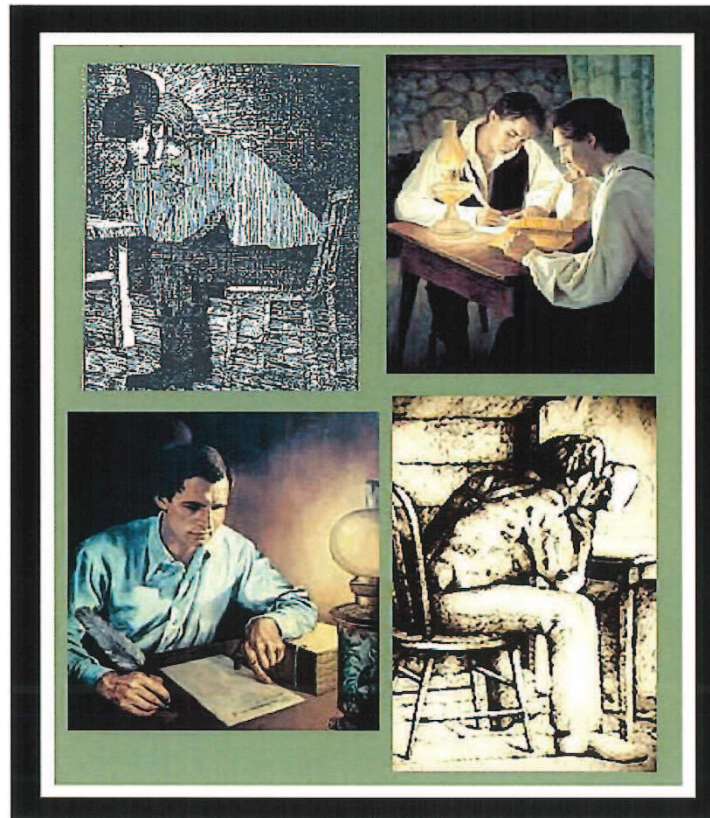
*“I will now give you a description of the manner in which the Book of Mormon*



*was translated. Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face into the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that parchment, the writing."* (David Whitmer - Founding Father of Mormonism - One of the Three Witnesses)

*"The manner in which he pretended to read and interpret was the same as when he looked for the money - diggers, with the stone in his hat, and his hat over his face, while the book of plates were at the same time hidden off in the woods. After this Martin Harris went away and Oliver Cowdry came and wrote for Smith, while he interpreted as above described."* (Isaac Hale, Joseph Smith's Father – In - Law)

*"In writing for your father, I frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour, with nothing between us...Now the first of that my husband translated was translated by the use of the Urim and the Thummim, and that was the part that Martin Harris lost, after that, he used a small stone, not exactly black, but was rather a dark color."* (Emma Hale Smith, Joseph's wife)



*Images of the Supernatural Translation of the Book of Mormon*



*Joseph Smith Wearing the Urim and Thummin and the Breastplate as He Translates the Book of Mormon*

*“Martin Harris related that the prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone...By the aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear, and were read by the prophet and written by Harris. Martin said further that the seer stone differed entirely from the Urim and Thummim that was obtained with the plates...Martin said there were not many pages translated while he wrote, after which Oliver Cowdry and others did the writing.” (Mormon Publication - "Millennial Star" - 1882)*

*“The unpardonable carelessness (the loss of the 116 pages) evoked the stormiest kind of chastisement from the Lord, who took from the prophet the Urim and Thummim and otherwise expressed His condemnation. By fervent prayer, and by otherwise humbling himself, the prophet, however, again found favor, and was presented with a strange, oval shaped, chocolate - colored stone, about the size of an egg, only more flat, which, it was promised, would serve the same purpose as the missing Urim and Thummim (the latter was a set of transparent stones set in a bow shaped frame, and very much resembled a pair of spectacles). With this stone all the present book of Mormon was translated.” (David Whitmer)*

Through this incredible series of events, one the crucial components of the vestments of the High Priest became part of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century hoax mired in magic and superstition.

## Verses 31-35

**(31) Make the robe of the ephod entirely of blue cloth, (32) with an opening for the head at its center. There shall be a woven edge like a collar around this opening, so that it will not tear. (33) Make pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, around the hem of the robe, with gold bells between them. (34) The gold bells and the pomegranates are to alternate around the hem of the robe. (35) Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he will not die.**

**“Make the robe of the ephod entirely of blue cloth, with an opening for the head at its center.”** - The **“ephod”** outermost - and therefore the most prominent - of the high priestly vestments has been previously described in detail (cf. p. 1173ff.). It was ornately decorated and multicolored (cf. vss. 6 - 13). Beneath the apron - like ephod was **“the robe of the ephod”** which covered the high priest from head to foot. **“In 39:22 this garment is described as ‘woven work.’ It seems to have been ankle length, with arm holes but no sleeves, and rather free flowing.”** (Sarna, p. 182) This is the first occurrence of the Hebrew term **“me’il”** in Scripture. It will recur frequently, usually in reference to the vesture of persons of high social stature.

**“The Hebrew word is subsequently translated ‘robe,’ 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel XXIV.4; 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles XV,27; Job XXIX,14; Ezek. XXIV, 16, in all which cases it specifies a garment worn by a king or a prince. It is also translated ‘mantle,’ 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel XV,27; Ezra IX, 3,5, Job 1, 20, and II, 12; Psalm CIX, 29; and ‘cloak,’ Isaiah LIX, 17. From all these uses, it may be inferred that the robe of the ephod was a garment of special dignity; a robe of office; and which gave also a princely character to the high priest.”** (Soltau, p. 256)

The significance of the **“robe of the ephod”** as a mark of the high priest’s exalted position within the Israelite nation is further reinforced by the fact that it was to be made **“entirely of blue cloth.”** The Hebrew noun **“tekhelet”** describes a range of colors between blue and purple with reference to the hue of the sky. As previously noted (cf. 25:4) the dye used to produce this intense color was extremely expensive and therefore reserved for use only by the most exalted members of society.

**“In the Bible, Hebrew ‘tekhelet’ is frequently paired with**



*The Vestments of the High Priest*

Hebrew 'argaman,' purple, both being dyes produced from the murex, a marine snail, term 'hillazon' in rabbinic tradition. This creature exudes a yellow fluid that becomes a dye in the red - purple range when exposed to sunlight. The desired shade was obtained by varying the species of murex and by adding other ingredients. 'Tekelet' was probably closer to a violet tint, while 'aragaman' dyed fabrics had a more reddish hue. The Phoenician coast was famous for its dyeing industry. Immense quantities of marine snail shells, dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.E. have been found at Ugarit. Modern attempts to reconstruct the process have shown that it required thousands of snails to produce sufficient dye for one robe. This, together with the intensity of the labor and the superiority of the dye's richness and stability, made the products very costly. Hence, the possession of 'tekele' or 'argama' dyed fabrics were marks of wealth, nobility and royalty." (Sarna, p. 157)

The robe was to completely encompass the high priest, that is, one piece of cloth woven throughout without a seam in front or back. The high priest would put on the robe by slipping his head through **"an opening for the head at its center."** There were, presumably,



also openings on either side for his arms, which would have been covered by the sleeves of the tunic worn beneath the **"robe of the ephod."**

**"There shall be a woven edge around the collar of this opening so that it will not tear."** – The Lord's instructions paid particular attention to the collar which would surround the opening of the robe. The concern appeared to be basically functional – **"so that it will not tear."** **"The opening, indeed, had to be pliant in order to allow the passage of the priest's head: but at the same time, it had to be strong so that it would not tear when it stretched to enable the head to go through."** (Cassuto, p. 382) The Hebrew text literally reads – **"It shall have a strong binding around its opening, the work of a weaver - it shall be like the opening of a coat of leather armor so that it does not tear."** The rabbis understood this description to mean that the woven cloth of the robe was doubled over around the opening and then covered with a protective layer of the strong

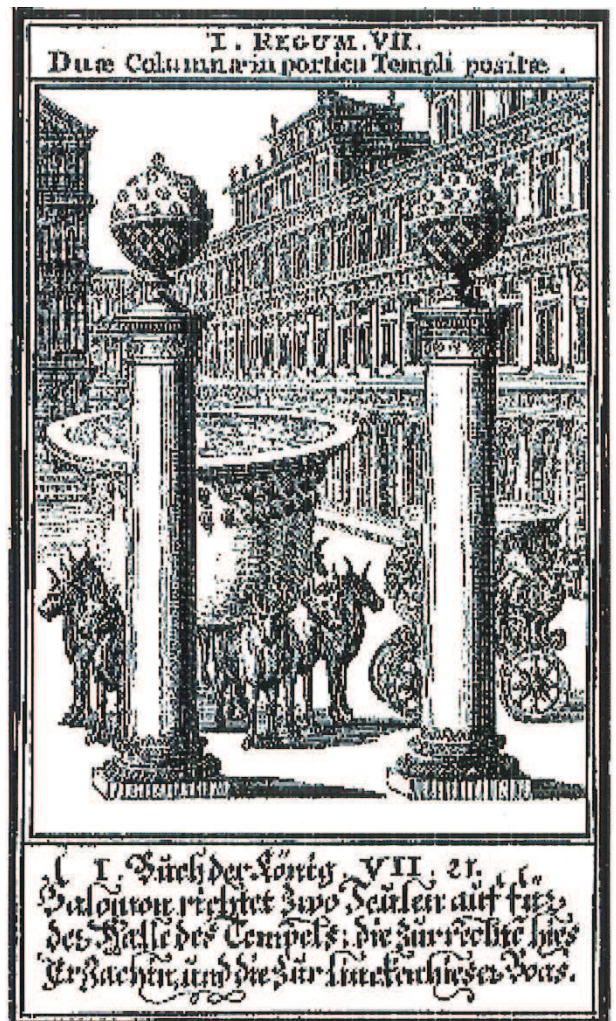
pliable leather used in the military armor of the period.

**"Make pomegranates of blue, gold and scarlet yarn around the hem of the robe" -**

pomegranate was a symbol of beauty and fertility among the Hebrews. In the Song of Songs, the Lover celebrated the beauty of his Beloved with reference to this fruit:

*“Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate... You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits.”* (Song of Songs 4:3, 12 - 13)

Pomegranates were among the fruits brought back by the spies to the Israelite encampment (Numbers 13:23) and were one of the seven fruits cited by Moses to describe the overwhelming abundance of the promised land: *“For the Lord your God bringing you into a good land - a land with streams and pools of water, with spring flowing in the valleys and the hills; a land with wheat and, barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey.”* (Deuteronomy 8:7 - 8) The great bronze columns of Solomon’s temple, Jakin and Boaz, were adorned with the image of hundreds of pomegranates:



*The Great Bronze Columns of Solomon’s Temple Adorned with Pomegranates 18<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving*

*“So Hiram finished all the work he had undertaken for King Solomon in the temple of the Lord: the two pillars; the two bowl shaped capitals on the top of the pillars; the two sets of network decorating the two bowl shaped capitals on the top of the pillars; the four hundred pomegranates for the two sets of network (two rows of pomegranates for each network, decorating the bowl shaped capitals on top of the pillars).”* (1 Kings 7:40 - 42)

The colors of these decorative tassels *“blue, purple and scarlet yarn”* - match those of the breastpiece and the ephod, thereby indicating that the garments were designed to be worn together.

*“With gold bells between them. The gold bells and the pomegranates are to alternate around the hem of the robe.”* - The rabbinic consensus taught that the fringe of the robe of the ephod consisted of seventy - two pomegranates and seventy - two bells. There was

significant disagreement however as to the purpose of the golden bells within the fringe. The explanation of the text – **“Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the holy place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he will not die.”** - is sufficiently ambiguous as to be interpreted in a variety of ways. It does, however, clearly suggest that the bells are to be more than merely decorative. Nahum Sarna summarized the opinions of the leading rabbis:

*“The unexplained role of the bells has given rise to various conjectures. Rashbam refers to the requirement of Leviticus 16: 16 - 17 that only the high priest - and nobody else - shall be present in the Tent of Meeting when he enters it to make expiation. Thus, the tinkling of the bells alerts the other priests to vacate the premises. The text cited speaks only of Yom Kippur, however. Bekhor Shor and Ramban draw an analogy from the convention governing the entry of a subject into a royal palace. Just as one should not appear abruptly and unceremoniously before royalty, so the delicate sounds of the bells signal ones presence and intention. Still other suggestions are that the tinkling attracts the attention of the worshipers outside the Tent to the fact that the high priest is performing the ritual; or the bells send out a message that no mishap had occurred in the course of the priestly duties such as happened to Aaron’s two sons (Leviticus 10). Another possibility is that the high priest himself is reminded by the sounds of the bells on his robe that he is to attune his heart and mind to his solemn duties and that he must be fully conscious of the fact that he is in the presence of God.”* (Sarna, p. 183)

The final warning – **“so that he will not die”** - most probably refers to the entire section rather than merely to the matter of the bells of the fringe. God defined every detail of tabernacle worship and those who stood before him as priests did so on His terms. Any deviation from divine instruction in these matters would have been a most serious offense, literally a matter of life and death. The use of the vestments which God specified with meticulous care would indicate that the high priest came before the Lord, not as a particular individual, but as the occupant of the office for which he had been chosen by God. The robes of his office were the evidence of this critical truth. Without them he would not be eligible to come into God’s presence and his encroachment within the sacred precincts. Of the Tabernacle would be punished in the same way as that of any other unauthorized Israelite and punished with the same extreme severity. The imposition of the death penalty in this matter is indicative of the profound significance of the sanctity of God’s presence.

*“Thus, the high priest must take care to wear the ephod, the breastplate and the robe when he enters the sanctuary so that he shall not die, because entering the Sanctuary without even one of these three vestments is punishable by death by the heavenly court, even if he leaves without having performed any priestly duties.”* (Chumash Shemot, p. 23)



*“The High Priest Within the Holy Place Before the Altar of Incense”*

### **Verses 36-38**

**(36) Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: *HOLY TO THE LORD.***  
**(37) Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban.**  
**(38) It is to be on Aaron’s forehead and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron’s forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the Lord.**

**“Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it...”** - The headgear of the high priest was to be adorned with a magnificent golden **“plate”** which bore the engraved inscription **“HOLY TO THE LORD.”** The Hebrew term translated as **“plate”** is derived from a root which means **“to sparkle”** or **“to shine.”** It most frequently appears in reference to the flowers of the grass or blossoms of a tree whose bright colors stand out amid the green foliage around them. **“As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.”** (Psalm 103:15 - 16) The term is also used to describe the royal crown of the king: **“Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for My anointed one. I will clothe his enemies with shame, but the crown of his head will be resplendent.”** (Psalm 132:17 - 18) In this context, the golden plate will subsequently be described as a **“sacred diadem”** (**“holy crown”**) in Exodus 29:6; 39:30. Unlike the a crown, however, this golden plate did not encircle the head but was to be worn **“on Aaron’s forehead”** and held in place at the base of the turban by **“a blue cord.”** The use of this terminology expressed the exalted rank of the high priest and asserted his equality with the kings and princes of the people. The Talmud reports that



*“The Vestments of the High Priest”*

the golden plate extended all the way across the front of the turban, *“from ear to ear,”* and was *“two fingerbreadths wide.”* (Sarna, p. 183) Evidently the plate was perforated at either end to allow the insertion of the *“blue cord”* which held it in place at the front of the turban over the forehead of the high priest. Rabbinic tradition added an additional perforation at the top center of the plate from which a *“blue cord”* extended vertically over the center of the turban to prevent the plate from sliding down. This would have served to hold both the forehead plate and the turban firmly in place. Thus, the headgear of the high priest is typically depicted with such a cord bisecting the turban over the crown of the high priest’s head as in the illustration to the left. In his Torah Commentary on Exodus, the Lubavitcher Rebbe paraphrased the text in keeping with these traditions: *“Have them make three slots in the plate; two at each end and one in the middle. Have them thread three cords made of turquoise wool through these slots, and tie them together at the back of the head. In this way, you shall place the Forehead Plate over a cord of turquoise wool at these three locations. The middle cord shall pass over the turban, preventing the*

*plate from falling lower than the high priest’s forehead. The Forehead Plate shall be placed below the front of the turban leaving enough space for the high priest to wear head ‘tefilin’ between the turban and the Forehead Plate.”* (Chumash, p. 224) (The Pharisees, and most of orthodox Judaism today, understood the command of Deuteronomy 6:7 - 9 – *“These commands that I give you today are to be upon your hearts....Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.”* - as a literal command. *“Tefilin”* are small back boxes which contain tiny scrolls of Exodus 13:1 - 10, 11 - 16 and Deuteronomy 11:13 - 21) which are bound to the forehead and the lower arms with leather straps. The rabbi allows for the assumption that Aaron would have observed this same practice.)

The golden plate was to be inscribed with the words *“HOLY TO THE LORD.”* The quality and permanence of the engraving is stressed by the words – *“and engrave on it as on a seal.”* This is the third time this language has occurred in this segment. It was also used in Verses 11 and 21 in reference to the engraving of the names of the tribes of Israel upon the gem stones of the breastplate. The threefold repetition is a deliberate emphasis of the character of the tribes of Israel and the high priest who represents them as having been set



apart by the Lord as His own. *“The inscriptions worn on the shoulders and heart of the priest indicate that he represents the tribes of Israel, while the words that he carries on his forehead proclaim that both he and those whom he represents, as well as all the services that he performs as priest, are completely **Holy to the Lord.**”* (Cassutto, p. 384)

The content of the inscription – **“HOLY TO THE LORD”** - (Hebrew: *“kodes l-YAHWEH”*). The primary thrust of the inscription was to signify *“the sacred nature of the office and person of the high priest, the one who is consecrated and committed to the service of God all his life.”* (Sama, p. 183) Thus, Leviticus 21:6 declared of the entire priesthood: **“They must be holy to their God and must not profane the name of their God. Because they present the offerings made to the Lord by fire, the food of their God, they are to be holy.”** When Korah



*Rabbi Schneerson Wearing Tefillin*

and his followers objected to the elevation of Aaron and his sons, Moses set the challenge before them in words which expressed the same concept of priestly consecration: **“Then he said to Korah and all his followers: ‘In the morning the Lord will show who belongs to Him, and who is holy, and He will have that person come near Him...The man whom the Lord chooses will be the one who is holy.’**” (Numbers 16:5,7) This holiness is not a matter of personal sinlessness, but of having been set apart by God to stand in His presence as the representative of the people. Jeremiah sadly noted the unique blessing of national consecration which had been heedlessly cast aside in his condemnation of the apostasy of the Israelites: **“Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of His harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them,’ declares the Lord.”** (Jeremiah 2:3) Josephus suggested that only the sacred name *“YHWH”* was engraved upon the plate, in contradiction to these instructions (cf. Josephus, p. 75). However, the Talmud includes the testimony of second century Rabbi Eleazar ben Jose, who asserted that he had personally seen the golden plate in Rome, among the treasures of the emperor, and that the inscription included both words written in one line across the length of the plate. (Sama, p. 184)

**“It is to be one Aaron’s forehead...It is to be on Aaron’s forehead continually.”** The deliberate repetition of the specification that the golden plate was to rest upon the forehead of Aaron and his successors reflects the unique significance of the forehead as *“that portion of the human countenance on which is depicted the purpose, will and mind”* (Soltau, p. 271) of the individual. The prophets often utilized this sense in their condemnation of Israel’s

moral corruption and obstinate inclination to evil. ***“You have the brazen look of a prostitute (literally “the forehead of a whore”): you refuse to blush with shame.”*** (Jeremiah 3:3) God promised Ezekiel that he would provide him with a forehead that was even harder than those of His rebellious people:

***“But the house of Israel is not willing to listen to you because they are not willing to listen to Me, for the whole house of Israel is hardened and obstinate (literally – “stiff of forehead”) But I will make you as unyielding and hardened as they are. I will make your forehead like the hardest stone, harder than flint.”*** (Ezekiel 3:7 - 9)

Speaking through his prophet Isaiah, God indicated that the problem of hard foreheads had been chronic throughout the history of Israel: "For I knew how stubborn you were; the sinews of your neck were iron, your forehead was bronze." (Isaiah 48:4) The same image is also used positively of the believer's firm resolve to remain faithful to the Lord: ***“Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face (literally “forehead”) like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.”*** (Isaiah 50:7)



***“King Uaiah Stricken With Leprosy Upon His Forehead at the Altar of Incense”***

***“Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face (literally “forehead”) like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.”*** (Isaiah 50:7)

In this connection, the worst and most feared form of leprosy was that which appeared on the forehead. The unfortunate victim became an immediate outcast: ***“The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone. He must live outside the camp.”*** (cf. Leviticus 13 :40 - 46) Perhaps the Old Testament’s most dramatic illustration of this dreaded curse was the punishment of sinful King Uzziah. Most appropriately, given his punishment, the King’s sin was to arrogate to himself the role of the high priest:

***“Uzziah, who had a censor in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the Lord’s temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. When Aariah the***

*chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave because the Lord had afflicted him. King Uiah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house, leprous and excluded from the temple of the Lord. Jotham, his son, had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land.” (2 Chronicles 26:19-21)*

The punishment of the man who had presumed to usurp the function of the high priest for himself, was to be marked in the very place where the true high priest wore the golden badge of his unique consecration to the Lord.

This concept is finally reflected in the imagery of Revelation where the saints of God are marked with **“His name and His Father’s name written on their foreheads”** (Revelation 14:1) and the dwellers of heaven are those who **“will see His face and His name will be**



*“The Unholy Trinity and the Mark of the Beast” by Pat Marvenko Smith*

*written on their foreheads.”* (Revelation 22:4) In grim contrast, the demonic beast from the earth will force **“to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name ... His number is 666.”** (Revelation 13:16 - 18; cf. 20:4)

**“It will be on Aaron’s forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever the gifts may be. It will be on Aaron’s forehead continually, so that they will be acceptable to the Lord.”** - The high priest was to be the

guardian of the tabernacle and its services. He was to protect the sanctity of the sanctuary and to insure that all that which occurred there took place in accordance with the Lord's command. Despite frequent failures, there were a number of instances in which courageous high priests carried out this responsibility with courage and integrity, as in the instance with King Uzziah cited above.

*“The reference is to the high priest's assumption of responsibility for any infraction of the rules governing the sacred offerings. The wearing of the plate inscribed with the legend ‘Holy to the Lord’ helps to concentrate his thoughts on his duties and on his accountability. At the same time, this consciousness effectively secures atonement for such offenses.”* (Sarna, p. 184)

The message of the golden plate – **“HOLINESS TO THE LORD”** and its prominent placement upon the forehead of the high priest as the representative of the people before God was to serve as a perpetual reminder of Israel’s unique calling as a holy nation. Near the end of the Old Testament, the prophet Zechariah used the words of this inscription to describe the holiness which would pervade the earth in the days of the Messianic era. **“On that day, HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the Lord’s house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar. Every**

**pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day, there will no longer be a Canaanite in the House of the Lord Almighty.”** (Zechariah 14:20 - 21)



*“The Consecration of Aaron as High Priest”*

### **Verses 39-41**

***(39) Weave the tunic of fine linen and make the turban of fine linen. The sash is to be the work of an embroiderer. (40) Make tunics, sashes and headbands for Aaron's sons to give them dignity and honor. (41) After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so that they may serve Me as priests.***

***“Weave the tunic of fine linen and make the turban of fine linen.”*** - The instructions go on to the more mundane components of the priestly vesture. ***“The tunic of fine linen”*** was a variation of the garment worn by both men and women beneath the rest of the clothing. It



*Icon of Christ the Great High Priest at the Altar With St. George the Martyr and St. John the Evangelist*

was similar to a full-length nightshirt. The only distinction here is the unique quality of the material – *“fine linen”* - from which the tunic was to be made. *“The turban”* was to be fashioned of the same material. The term is derived from a root which means *“to wind around.”* It is used in reference to the headgear of the high priest with the single exception of Ezekiel 21:26 where it describes the downfall of King Zedekiah: *“O profane and wicked prince of Israel whose day has come, whose time of punishment has reached its climax, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was.”* *“The head covering consisted of a long kerchief, which could be wrapped and wound around the head so as to give it a high a majestic shape.”* (Cassutto, p. 385) In this way the royal dignity of the high priest was expressed and the role of the Messiah whom he prefigured as high priest and king was prefigured.

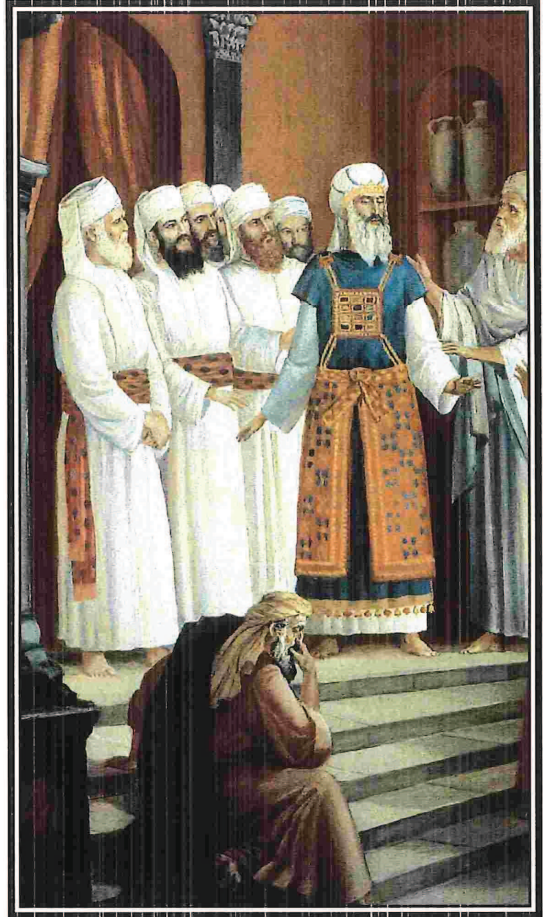
*“The sash is to be the work of an embroiderer.”* - The finely decorated cloth belt – *“the sash”* - was to be fashioned of the same costly materials from which the tabernacle curtains and the other vestments were made – *“The sash was of finely twisted linen and of blue purple and scarlet yarn - the work of an embroiderer - as the Lord commanded Moses.”* (Exodus 39:29) Other than its application to the priestly vestments, the term only appears in Isaiah 22:21 where it describes the official robes of Eliakim, the prime minister of the kingdom of Judah: *“In that day I will summon My servant Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah. I will cloth him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him.”* The beautifully decorated belt – *“the work of an embroiderer”* - was worn over the robe and the tunic beneath the ephod. The phrase – *“the work of an embroiderer”* had also been used in reference to the inner curtains of the tabernacle (cf. Exodus 26:36;

27:16) as an indication of the unique quality of the craftsmanship required for these components of the sanctuary. The continuation of this language reinforces the connection between the office of the high priest and the sanctuary in which he served. Maimonides, one of the foremost teachers of classical Judaism, reported that this sash was *“three finger breadths wide and thirty two cubits (48 feet) in length, and it was wound around the body.”* (Sarna, p. 185)

***“Make tunics, sashes and headbands for Aaron's sons to give them dignity and honor.”*** The phrase ***“Aaron's sons”*** is the standard Old Testament designation for the entire Levitical priesthood. The vestments of the ordinary priests included four components, in contrast to the eight components of the high priest's garments (The four elements unique to the high priest were the ephod, the breastplate, the blue robe, and the inscribed golden plate.) These robes of office were also intended to give the priests ***“dignity and honor”*** but they were deliberately distinct from those of their leader. The linen tunic and ornamental sash were very similar to those of the high priest. The text uses a different term, however, suggesting that the priest's headgear was smaller and less elaborate than the unique turban worn by, Aaron and his successors. The work of the priests in preparing and offering the sacrifices was both arduous and messy. Their more functional attire reflects the nature of their duties. *“In light of the work at least some of them had - butchering, lifting hunks of meat on and off the altar, separating innards from cookable flesh, carrying coals, cleaning up ashes – the wearing of formal robes would not have been appropriate in any case.”* (Stuart, p. 617)

***“After you have put these cloths on your brother Aaron and his sons anoint and ordain them.”*** - This is the first of a series of instructions in regard to the ceremonies by which the Levitical priesthood would be established once the Tabernacle had been completed. The actual implementation of these rituals is described in Leviticus 8. The profound significance of the vestments as official robes of office both for the high priest and the priesthood in general is indicated by the fact that the vesting itself is the first of the three ceremonial actions by which these men would become priests. It is significant to note that Moses himself was to formally place the garments upon them as part of the ritual for he was the representative of God who had directly received the command to set up this institution and had been specifically instructed to place these individuals into this office. *“Moses had to dress them himself, because this was an integral part of investing them in the office of the priesthood, as only he could do.”* (Chumash, p. 225) The placement of these vestments upon them would be the external sign of their divine calling as Moses acted in the name of God. The ceremony of anointing, with oil meticulously prepared for this use alone (Exodus 30:22 - 25) would signify the reality that these men had been set apart by God for service in the holy place which He had set apart as His dwelling place in the midst of His people. The text uses two other verbs to describe what was to be done. Moses was to ***“ordain them.”*** The Hebrew word here literally means *“to fill the hand,”* that is to formally entrust to the chosen individual the material for the work entrusted to him and the tools to execute it. The same etymology is reflected in the English word is derived from the

Latin “*manus*” and “*dare*” – “*given into the hand.*” The concluding phrase - “*Consecrate them so that they may serve Me as priests*” - seems to summarize the process previously described, rather than add a third ceremony. “*To consecrate*” means “*to set someone or something apart as holy.*” In order to carry out their priestly service, it was necessary for the priesthood to have been separated from the profane things of this world – “*so that they may serve Me as priests.*” Without this separation they would not have been fit to stand before the Lord on behalf of the people. This separation was indicated by the vestments of their office and signified by the ceremonies by which they entered their ministry.

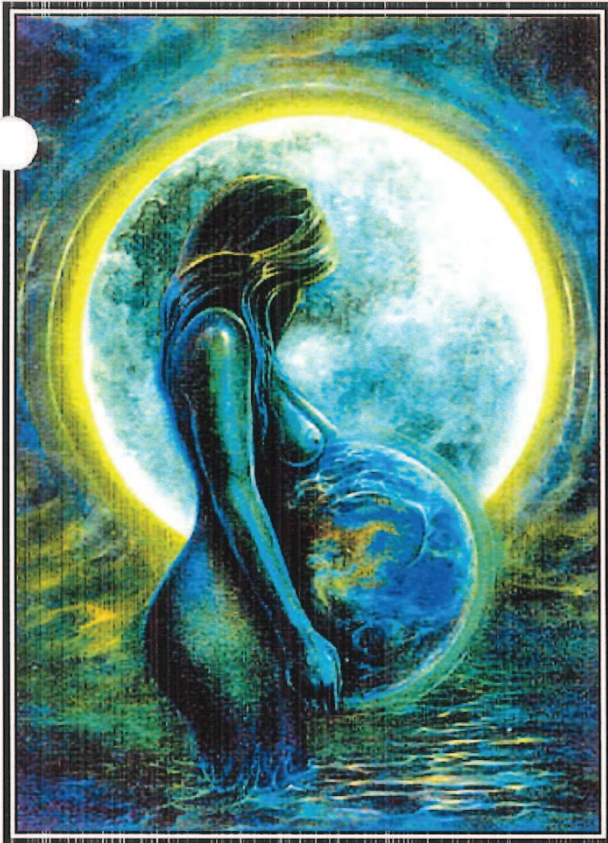


*“The Vestments of the High Priest and the Priesthood” by Zalman Smekhov*

***“Make them linen undergarments as a covering for the body, reaching from the waist to the thigh.”***

The “*linen undergarments*” of the priesthood are cited separate from the vestments because their intent was not “*to give them dignity and honor*” like the Vestments and the other garments which would have been visible to the congregation. This distinction is reflected by the fact, that for reasons of modesty, these undergarments were the only component of priestly attire which the priest put on himself without assistance from others. They were designed to completely cover the genital organs of the priests – “*reaching from the waist to the thigh.*”

The text places particular emphasis on the importance of these garments – “*Aaron and his sons must wear them whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, or approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place, so that they will not incur guilt and die.*” A similar concern had previously been expressed in Exodus 20:26 – “*And do not go up to My altar on steps lest your nakedness be exposed on it.*” This emphasis upon humble modesty before the Lord must be understood in the context of the brazen sexuality of the pagan religions throughout the region. Since many of these religions were basically fertility cults, the worship of their gods and goddesses often involved sexual excess which indulged in the most flagrant perversion. The priests and priestesses of these idols frequently carried out their functions in the nude or dressed in a deliberately provocative manner, at times operating as little more than temple prostitutes. While such practices flourished both in Egypt and the cultures of Mesopotamia (the lands of Israel’s original and most recent origin), they most directly threatened Israel at this point in the cult of Baal and his consort (and sister!) Asherah. Asherah was the earth mother, goddess of the sea and of growing things. The groves of trees which typically surrounded the high places where she and Baal which were



*“Asherah - The Earth Mother”*

worshipped signified her fertility. Extrabiblical documentation from the period is vividly pornographic in describing the romps of the Canaanite gods and goddesses. In his comprehensive study *Flame of Yahweh - Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Dr. Richard Davidson offers this assessment of the purpose and practice of the Baal/ Asherah cult:

*“The foundational premise of the Canaanite fertility myths and rituals was that the processes of nature are controlled by the relations of the gods and goddesses. In particular, the fertility of the earth results from the sexual union of a male god and his consort, a female goddess. In the Baal cult, this incestuous sexual relationship is between the storm god Baal, who dominates the Canaanite pantheon and his sister Anat or Asherah. Since the land is fertilized by the sperm.” Asherah – “The Earth Mother” (rain) of Baal, it is crucial that his sexual activity be stimulated. According*

*to Canaanite fertility cult theology when the divine sexual activity of the god is emulated at the earthly high place, that same activity is further stimulated by means of sympathetic magic. Thus, there appeared the cultic offices of male and female personnel, who, among other functions, engaged in sacred prostitution, or, if not prostitution (sex for hire) at least ritual sex. Worshipers were encouraged to engage in ritual intercourse with the shrine devotees in order to emulate and stimulate the sex activities of the gods...By engaging in sexual intercourse with the devotees of the shrine, they believed that this encouraged the gods and goddesses to do likewise, with the result that a person’s desire for increase in herds and fields, as well as his own family could be realized.” (Davidson, pp. 93 - 94)*

The same twisted premise was reflected in the sacrifice of infants, the evidence of the worshiper’s potency and fertility, to the Moabite god Molech in the Vale of Hinnon outside of Jerusalem. From the worship of the golden calf at the foot of Sinai – **“the people sat down to indulge in drunken and sexual orgies”** (Exodus 32:6) to the final destruction of the Kingdom of Judah the lure of such perversion, although constantly denounced by the prophets, proved irresistible to much of Israel. As the people first approached the Promised Land, they were seduced by the priestesses of Moab: **“While Israel was staying at Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods.”** (Numbers 25:1 - 2) The indignation of Phineas, the grandson of Aaron, was such that he drove his spear through the bodies of an Israelite and a Moabite as they coupled in idolatrous intercourse. (Numbers 25:7 - 8) King Rehoboam,



Solomon's son by one of his pagan wives, an Ammonite princess, allowed the sexual cults of his mother's people to flourish in his kingdom, even to the extent of homosexual perversion at the high places:

***“They also set up for themselves high places, sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. There were even male shrine prostitutes in the land; the people engaged in all the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.”*** (1 Kings 14:22 - 24)

Many centuries later, the prophet Hosea's condemnation revealed that the situation remained unchanged:

***“A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. They sacrifice on the mountaintops and bring offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and tenebinth where the shade is pleasant. Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughter – in - laws to adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution and your daughter – in - laws when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes...Ephriam is joined in idols. Leave him alone! Even when their drinks are gone they continue their prostitution. Their rulers dearly love shameful ways. A whirlwind will sweep them away and their sacrifices will bring them shame.”*** (Hosea 4:12 - 14, 17 - 19)



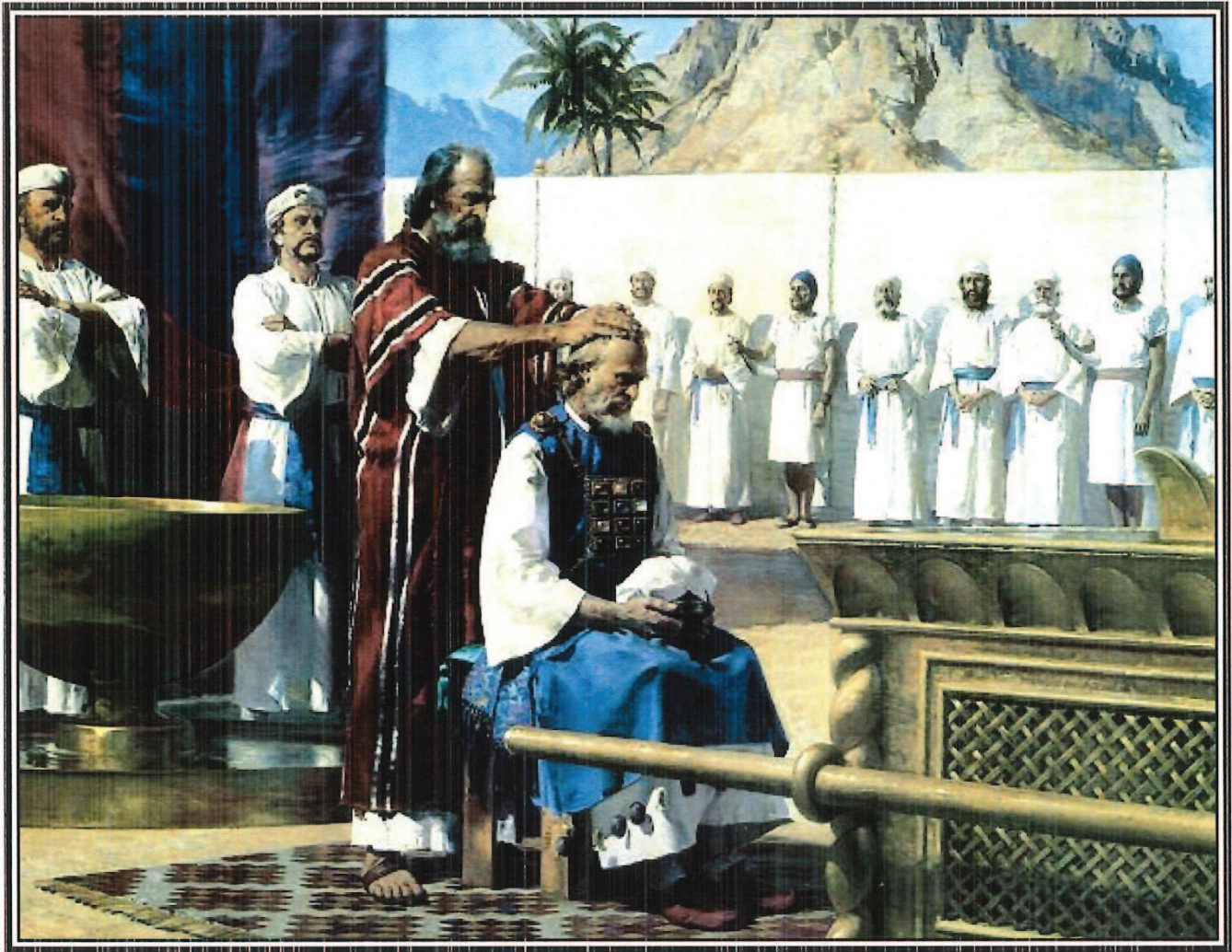
*“The Priestess” by John Collier*

The worship of Yahweh was fundamentally different than all such idolatry. The priests of Yahweh were to practice consistent modesty, on pain of death for transgression .

## ***Verse 42***

***This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants.***

***“This is to be a lasting ordinance...”*** - These instructions concerning vestments are permanently valid.



*“The Consecration of Aaron As High Priest of Israel”*

## *Exodus Chapter 29*

*(1) “This what you are to do to consecrate them, so that they may serve Me as priests: Take a young bull and two rams without defect. (2) And from fine wheat flour, without yeast, make bread and cakes mixed with oil, and wafers spread with oil. (3) Put them in a basket and present them in it - along with the bull and the two rams. (4) Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and wash them with water. (5) Take the garments and dress Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod itself and the breastpiece. Fasten the ephod on him by its skillfully woven waistband. (6) Put the turban on his head and attach the sacred diadem to the turban. (7) Take the anointing oil, and anoint him by pouring it on his head. (8) Bring his sons and dress them in tunics (9) and put headbands on them. Then tie sashes on Aaron and his sons. The priesthood is theirs by a lasting ordinance. In this way you shall ordain Aaron and his sons. (10) “Bring the bull to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. (11) Slaughter it in the Lord’s presence at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. (12) Take some of the bull’s blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour out the rest of it at the base of the altar. (13) Then take all the fat from*

around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, and both kidneys with fat on them, and burn them on the altar. (14) And burn the bull's flesh and its hide and its offal outside the camp. It is a sin offering. (15) Take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. (16) Slaughter it and take the blood and sprinkle it against the altar on all sides. (17) Cut the ram into pieces and wash the inner parts and the legs, putting them with the head and the other pieces. (18) Then burn the entire ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the Lord, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the Lord by fire. (19) "Take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. (20) Slaughter it, and take some of its blood and put it on the lobes of the right ears of Aaron and his sons, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. Then sprinkle blood against the altar on all sides. (21) And take some of the blood on the altar and some of the anointing oil and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and their garments. Then he and his sons and their garments will be consecrated. (22) "Take from this ram the fat, the fat tail, the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, both kidneys with the fat on them and the right thigh. (This is the ram for the ordination.) (23) From the basket of bread which is without yeast, which is before the Lord, take a loaf, and a cake made with oil, and a wafer. (24) Put all these in the hands of Aaron and his sons, and wave them before the Lord as a wave offering. (25) Then take them from their hands and burn them on the altar along with the burnt offering for a pleasing aroma to the Lord, and offering made to the Lord by fire. (26) After you take the breast of the ram for Aaron's ordination, wave it before the Lord as a wave offering, and it will be your share. (27) Consecrate those parts of the ordination ram that belong to Aaron and his sons: the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. (28) This is always to be the regular share from the Israelites for Aaron and his sons. It is the contribution the Israelites are to make to the Lord from their fellowship offerings. (29) "Aaron's sacred garments are to belong to his descendants so that they can be anointed and ordained in them. (30) The son who succeeds him as priest and comes to the Tent of Meeting to minister in the Holy Place is to wear them seven days. (31) "Take the ram for the ordination and cook the meat in a sacred place. (32) At the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, Aaron and his sons are to eat the meat of the ram and the bread that is in the basket. They are to eat these offerings by which atonement was made for their ordination and consecration. But



*"The Consecration of Aaron"*



*"The High Priest"*

*on one else may eat them because they are sacred. (34) And if any of the meat of the ordination ram or any bread is left over till morning, burn it up. It must not be eaten because it is sacred. (35) "Do for Aaron and his sons everything I have commanded you, taking seven days to ordain them. (36) Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement. Purify the altar by mailing atonement for it, and anoint it to consecrate it. (37) For seven days make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be holy. (38) This is what you are to offer on the altar each day: two lambs a year old. (39) Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight. (40) With the first lamb, offer a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives, and a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering. (41) Sacrifice the other lamb at twilight with the same grain offering and its drink offering as in the morning - a pleasing*

*aroma, an offering made to the. Lord by fire. (42) "For the generations to come, this offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord. There I will meet you and speak to you; (43) There also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated to My glory. (44) "So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve Me as priests. (45) Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. (46) They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.*

### *Verses 1-3*

*This is what you are to do to consecrate them, so that they may serve Me as priests: take a young bull and two rams without defect. And from fine wheat flour, without yeast, make bread, and cakes mixed with oil, and wafer spread with oil. Put them in a basket, and present them in it - along with the bull and two rams.*

*"This is what you are to do to consecrate them, so that they may serve Me as priests..."* Having completed the detailed description of the vestments of the high priest and the priesthood and commanded that they be consecrated by anointing and ordination, the Lord proceeded to the instructions for the consecration of the priesthood and the Tabernacle where they would conduct their ministry. The narrative of the implementation of these instructions is recorded in Leviticus chapters 8 - 9, which follows these directives with

meticulous care – “almost word for word.” (Cassutto, p. 387) The service was to be repeated seven times, the use of the sacred seven indicating that these rituals perfectly established the priesthood which would carry out the services of the Tabernacle and the Temple across the generations until all that which they foreshadowed was perfectly accomplished in the death of Messiah Jesus. Rabbi Schneerson observed:

*“Having completed the instructions for making the priestly vestments, God instructed Moses how these garments are to be used to install the priests into the office of the priesthood. The installation ceremony was to be repeated daily for a whole week, and was to take place from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of Adar, 2449, the week leading up to the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nisan. Every day that week, the Tabernacle was erected in the morning and dismantled after the installation rites were finished. Only from the 1<sup>st</sup> of Nisan onward was it left standing.”* (Shumash Chemot, p. 226)

Note that in this tradition the consecration ceremonies were to take place during the last week of “Adar” the final month of the year, so that the priesthood would have been established by “the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Nisan” the beginning of the new year. In this way it was taught that the establishment of the priesthood marked the beginning of a new era. The entire nation of Israel was assembled to witness this momentous occasion. (Leviticus 8:3)

The consecration ceremonies were to be conducted by Moses, acting as the direct representative of God. Moses carried out the unique combination of prophet and priest throughout his life and remains, to this day, the pivotal figure in the history of God’s covenant relationship with Israel. “Moses himself, as the representative of the unseen King, is the consecrator: as the sacrificer throughout these ceremonies through whom the others

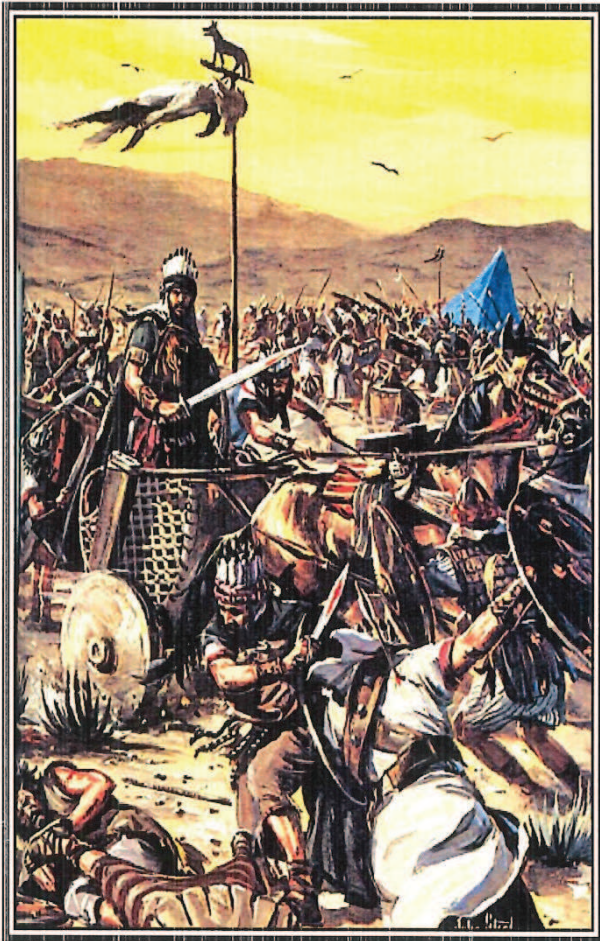


*“The Priestly Blessing At the Dedication of the Temple”*

*receive their office, he has for this time a higher priesthood than that of Aaron. In accordance with the principle which runs through the history of Israel, he, the ruler, solemnly divests himself of the priestly office and transfers it to another. The fact that he has been a priest is solemnly merged into his office as lawgiver.” (McClintock, p. 570)*

The perspective is affirmed by Psalm 99:5 - 6, the only specific Biblical identification of Moses as a priest. ***“Exalt the Lord our God and worship at His footstool; He is holy. Moses and Aaron were among His priests, Samuel was among those who called on His Name; they called on the Lord and He answered them.”***

Scripture provides little detail as to the manner in which the succession of high priests was implemented. The position was designed to be hereditary, passed from father to son, beginning with Aaron. Given the chaotic history of Israel there were a number of interruptions of the normal succession. The kings controlled the succession under the monarchy. Thus, for example, Solomon removed Abiathar who had supported the candidacy of his brother Adonijah, and replaced him with Zadok, the priest who had anointed him to the throne. (1 Kings 2:26 - 27) While the Jews were subject to foreign conquerors their masters (Persian, Greek, Roman) typically exercised the prerogative of



***“Jereboam Defeat in Battle With Abijah”***

appointing the high priests themselves, choosing candidates who would be sufficiently submissive to the will of their masters. The potential for abuse under such circumstances is indicated by the appointment of Menelaus, high priest from 171 - 162 B.C. who was neither a descendant of Aaron nor a member of the Tribe of Levi, but a Benjaminite. Menelaus murdered his predecessor and plundered the Temple treasury to pay the bribes to Greek officials which had obtained his appointment. (II Maccabees 4:27) Josephus lists eighty-two incumbents of the high priestly office between Aaron and Phineas hen Samuel, high priest at the destruction of the second Temple.

This elaborate, extended consecration ceremony seems to have been unique to the establishment of the priesthood and high priestly office. It was not repeated with the accession of each subsequent high priest. The legitimacy of the priesthood was based upon its descent from Aaron and God's certification of that priesthood in these rituals. Abijah, the second King of

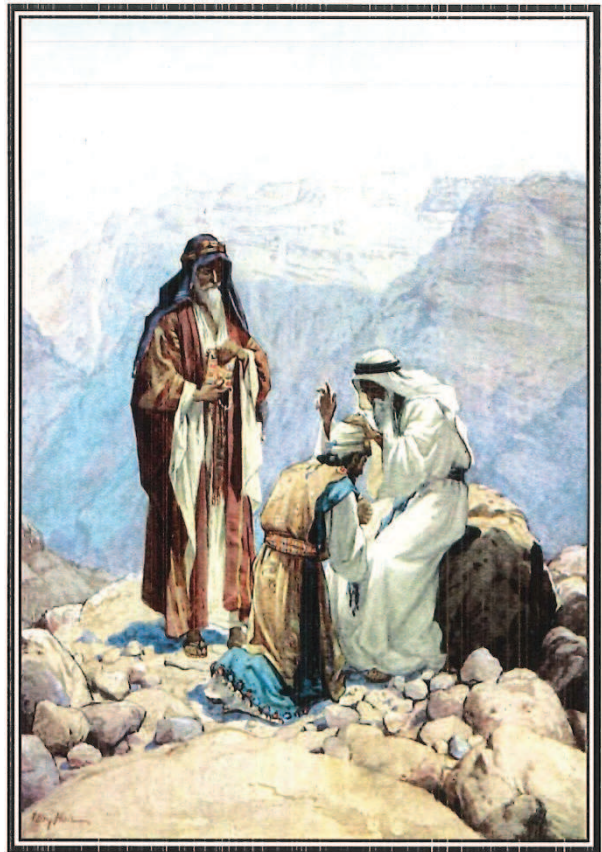
Judah, made that point in an appeal to the warriors of the northern kingdom of Israel on the eve of a battle between the two realms.

***“And now you plan to resist the kingdom of the Lord, which is in the hands of David’s descendants. You are indeed a vast army, and have with you the golden calves that Jereboam made to be your gods. But didn’t you drive out the priests of the Lord, the sons of Aaron and the Levites, and make priests of your own as the peoples of other lands do? Whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams may become a priest of what are not gods!”*** (2 Chronicles 13:8 - 11)

***“Take a young bull and two rams without defect.”*** - The text begins with an enumeration of the materials to be used in the rituals. The verb ***“take”*** is the characteristic term used for that which has been selected for use in divine worship and is to be brought before the Lord in His sanctuary. The consistent emphasis is that all of these ingredients were to be of the finest quality. Three perfect (***“without defect”***) animals were to be used in the sacrifices related to the ceremony each day - a total of twenty -one throughout the seven daily repetitions. In the narrative of Leviticus 8, these animals are identified as ***“the bull of the sin offering,”*** ***“the ram of the burnt offering,”*** and ***“the ram of ordination.”*** The manner in which they will be offered will be subsequently detailed.

***“And from fine wheat flour, without yeast, make bread and cakes mixed with oil and wafers spread with oil.”*** - Three cereal offerings, each a variety of unleavened bread (Hebrew – ***“massah”***), were to be prepared. They were to be prepared from ***“fine wheat flour”*** which was relatively rare among the Hebrews and extremely expensive. The significance of the three different breads is not indicated. The same three types of bread are mentioned in Leviticus 7:12.

***“Put them in a basket and present them in it - along with the bull and the two rams.”*** Each of the seven days, the animals and the breads were to be presented before the Tabernacle so that all of the materials needed to carry out the rituals of that day could be completed. The presentation conveyed the sense of these materials being set apart before the Lord for His particular use. In this way, the presentation of the offerings anticipates the



***“Moses Consecrates Eleazar As High Priest and Entrusts to Him the Ephod and Breastplate of His Father Aaron” –  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration by Sir  
William Hole***

significance of the ceremony in consecrating the priesthood. *“The verb - bring near - is the theme of this section, which describes the transfer of sanctified offerings and humans from the mundane to the sacred sphere.”* (Propp, II, p. 456)

### ***Verses 4 - 11***

***Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and wash them with water. Take the garments, and dress Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod itself and the breastpiece. Fasten the ephod on him by its skillfully woven waistband. Put the turban upon his head and attach the sacred diadem to the turban. Take the anointing oil and anoint him by pouring it on his head. Bring his sons and dress them in tunics and put headbands on them. The priesthood is theirs by a lasting ordinance. In this way you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.***

***“Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting”*** - The ceremony began with a ritual cleansing of Aaron and his sons at the great bronze laver near the entrance to the Tabernacle. The Hebrew verb ***“bring”*** in this verse is the same as the verb ***“present”*** in Verse 3. It carries the same connotation of removing something or someone from the realm of worldly things and formally presenting them before the Lord for His sacred use. Ritual washing was a prominent part of the services of the Tabernacle. The priests were required to wash their hands and feet whenever they entered the sanctuary on pain of death (cf. Exodus 30:17 - 21). In this instance, for the institution of the priesthood, the washing is more extensive as Aaron and his sons must undergo ritual purification by the immersion of their entire bodies in the water. This would later also be the case on the Day 1 of Atonement when the High Priest entered and left and Holy of Holies (cf. Leviticus 16:4, 24). Leviticus 8:6 indicates that Moses performed the ablutions himself. Since the linen undergarment is not mentioned in the vesting which followed, it presumably had been worn during the immersion. *“Washing was necessary before they could be permitted to come into contact with holy things. It represented the removal of the uncleanness caused by sin in the realm of the ordinary or common, which had to be dealt with before they could enter the realm of the holy.”* (Mackay, p. 488) It should be noted that the water washing is only the beginning of the ceremonial purification. Full cleansing from the quilt of sin would require the shedding of blood. Hebrews 10 makes this point clearly in affirming the efficacy of the blood of Christ and alludes to these ritual washings which were to be fulfilled in Christian baptism:

***“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great priest over the House of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, and having our bodies washed with pure water.”*** (Hebrews 10:19 - 21; cf. Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5)



***“Take the garments and dress Aaron with the robe of the ephod...”*** - After the cleansing of their bodies had been completed, Moses was to vest Aaron and his sons in the robes of their office. The instruction begins with the high priest. The listing of high priestly vestments here includes all of the components which had been commanded in Chapter 28 with the exception of the undergarment which, presumably, he was already wearing – ***“the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod itself and the breastpiece...its skillfully woven waistband. Put the turban on his head and attach the sacred diadem to the turban.”*** In this description ***“the plate of pure gold”*** (28:36) is identified as ***“the sacred diadem.”*** A ***“diadem”*** is ***“the regal headband worn by the kings of Persia”*** derived from a Greek verb which means ***“to bind around.”*** Linguists suggest that the unusual Hebrew noun ***“nezer”*** used in this phrase comes from the golden band at the base of the crown of the Pharaoh which displayed the rearing cobra and vulture representing the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt. A more literal translation of the Hebrew here might be ***“the holiness crown”*** reflecting the inscription engraved on the golden plate – ***“HOLY TO THE LORD.”***

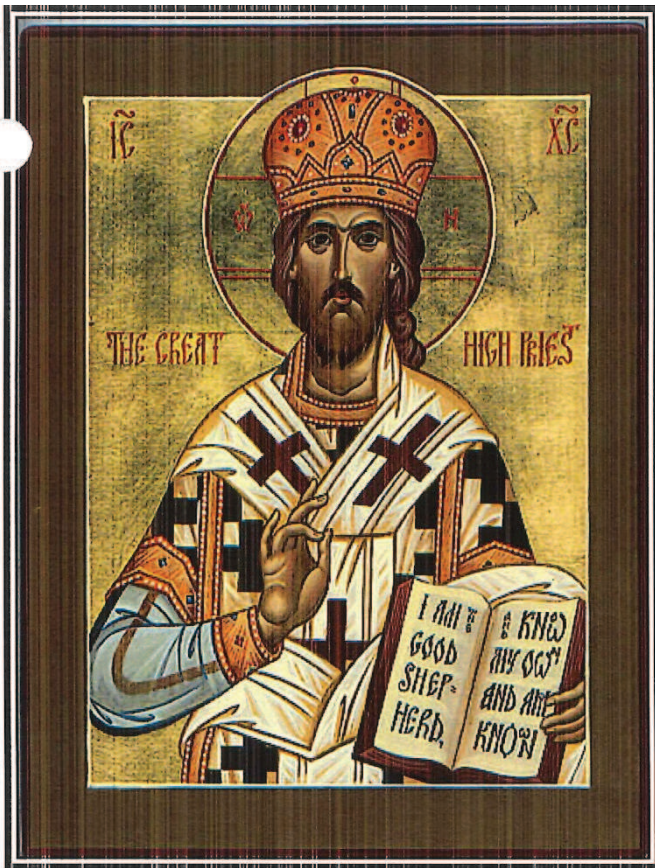


***“Aaron in the Vestments of His Office”***  
***18th Century English Bible Engraving***

***“Take the anointing oil and anoint him by pouring it on his head.”*** - Once the high priest had been formally vested in the robes of his office, he was to be anointed with a specially prepared richly scented oil. The formula for the anointing oil will be provided in Chapter 30. Presumably, his turban had been removed prior to the anointing. David indicated that the anointing oil pouring down over the head of the high priest signified the blessings of God poured out upon him.

***“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore.”*** (Psalm 133)

While other priests were also anointed (cf. Exodus 28:41; 30:30; 40:15; Leviticus 10:7), the anointing of the high priest carried a special significance as the mark of his unique consecration to carry out his role as the representative of the people before the Lord. The



*Icon Depicted Christ as High Priest*

designation *“the anointed priest”* became one of the titles of the high priest: *“If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the Lord a young bull without defect...Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull’s blood...Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull’s blood into the Tent of Meeting.”* (Leviticus 4:3, 5, 16) The instructions for *“Yom Kippur”* describe the permanent establishment of the holy day with this observation:

*“The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred garments and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the Tent of Meeting, and for the altar, and for the priests and for all the people of the community.”* (Leviticus 16:32 - 33)

The texts further imply that the anointing of the high priest involved a more abundant application of oil – *“pouring it on his head.”*

*“The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments, must not let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes. He must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother, nor leave the sanctuary of His God or desecrate it, because he has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God. I am the Lord.”* (Leviticus 21:10 - 12)

In this connection, the designation of the Savior as *“the Anointed One”* (*“Messiah,” “Christ”*) further reinforces the role of the high priest as one who prefigured and was perfectly fulfilled in Jesus who, as the great high priest, would make the once for all sacrifice for the sins of humanity in His own blood upon the cross.

*“Bring his sons, and dress them in tunics, and put headbands on them.”* - A similar procedure is followed in reference to the sons of Aaron, without reference to anointing. After the washing they are also to don their vestments and be presented before the Lord.

*“The priesthood is theirs by a lasting ordinance. In this way you shall ordain Aaron and*

**his sons.”** - The ordination ritual which follows is introduced with an assertion of the permanence of the priesthood which is to be established here. This ordination is God's action in setting apart the descendants of Aaron- **“Aaron and his sons”** - as the custodians of the office of high priest and the priesthood of Tabernacle and Temple.

### **Verses 10 - 14**

***Bring the bull to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on his head. Slaughter it in the Lord's presence at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Take some of the bull's blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour out the rest of it at the base of the altar. Then take all of the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, and both kidneys with the fat on them, and burn them on the altar. But burn the bull's flesh and its hide and its offal outside the camp. It is a sin offering.***

**“Bring the bull to the front of the Tent of Meeting...”** - The instructions for the conduct of the sacrifices begin with the bull. The bull is to serve as **“a sin offering”** - that is to say, the sacrifice becomes a substitute for those on whose behalf the sacrifice is being made. Their guilt is transferred to the sacrificial offering. The animal's death then provides expiation and atonement for those who have offered it in accordance with God's instruction. The sacrifice was to be presented before the Lord – **“Bring the bull to the front of the Tent of Meeting...Slaughter it in the Lord's presence.”** The substitutionary significance of the sacrifice was indicated by the ceremonial laying on of hands before the Lord – **“Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on his head.”** The same ritual of laying on hands can be seen in the substitution of the Levites for all of the firstborn of Israel:

***“Bring the Levites to the front of the Tent of Meeting and assemble the whole Israelite community. You are to bring the Levites before the Lord, and the Israelites are to lay their hands on them. Aaron is to present the Levites before the Lord as a wave offering from the Israelites, so that they may be ready to do the work of the Lord. After the Levites lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, use the one for a sin offering to the Lord, and the other as a burnt offering to make atonement for the Levites. Have the Levites stand in front of Aaron and his sons and then present them as a wave offering to the Lord. In this way you are to set the Levites apart from the other Israelites, and the Levites will be Mine. After you have purified' the Levites and presented them as a wave offering, they are to come to do their work at the Tent of Meeting. They are the Israelites who are to be given wholly to Me. I have taken them as My own in place of the firstborn, the first male offspring from every Israelite woman. Every firstborn male in Israel, whether man or animal is Mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set them apart for Myself. I have taken the Levites in place of all the firstborn sons of Israel.”*** (Numbers 8:9 - 19)



*“The Ceremony of the Scapegoat” by Rudolf Schäfer*

A similar substitution also occurred in when the high priest laid his hands upon the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement, although in this instance the animal was driven out into the wilderness rather than sacrificed. As the high priest laid his hands on the goat’s head the sin of Israel was transferred from the people to the substitutionary offering.

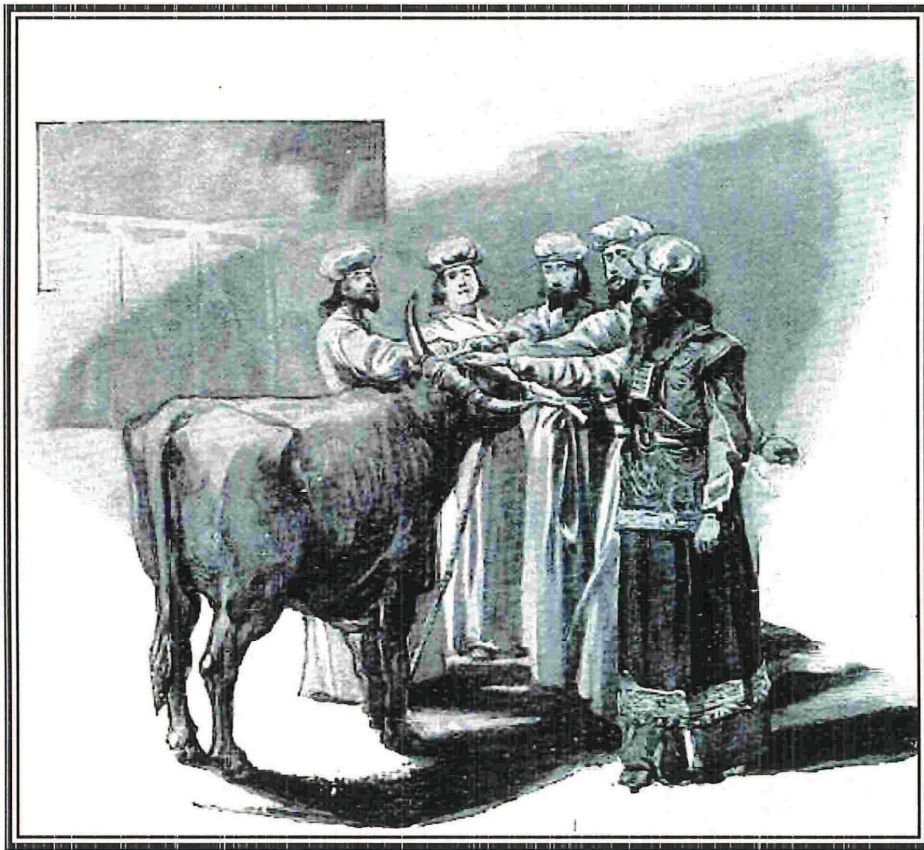
*“He is to lay both hands on the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites - all their sins - and put them on the goat's head. He shall then send the goat away into the desert, in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins.”*  
(Leviticus 16:21 - 22)

Commentator John MacKay asserts that the concept of substitution has always been the essence of the idea of sacrifice. He cites the replacement of Isaac with the ram provided by the Lord on Mount Moriah as a classic illustration of the concept:

*“What is involved is substitution - (‘This animal represents me. What happens to it is what should happen to me.’) Such an understanding of sacrifice existed from the earliest times. It is implicit in the narrative of Abraham and Isaac where Abraham offered the ram ‘as a burnt offering in place of his son.’ (Genesis 22:13)...What, however, does the death of the animal signify? The*

*perfect animal was the substitute for the offerer, and the death of the animal indicated that the worshipper was himself justly liable to death for his sin, but a substitute now suffered that death for him.*” (MacKay, p. 492)

The Hebrew verb in this phrase – **“shall lay their hands on its head”** does not refer to momentary casual contact. The priests to be were to firmly place both of their hands upon the head of the animal and to lean the weight of their bodies upon that animal through their hands. No doubt, the animal would have swayed and perhaps attempted shy away from the burden being inflicted upon him. If this were the case, it would only have enhanced the effectiveness of the symbolism. The symbolic significance of the transfer of the burden of sin from those for whom the sacrifice was about to be offered to the animal sacrifice was dramatically indicated in this way. There would have been no ambiguity as to that which was taking place.



*“Aaron and His Sons Laying Their Hands Upon the Bull To Be Offered in the Ordination Ceremony” – 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Picture*

**“Slaughter it in the Lord's presence at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.”** – Having indicated the significance of the sacrifice by laying the beneficiaries hands upon the head of the offering, the next step was the slaughter of the bull. The animal would be slain by slitting its throat. The command was addressed to Moses who continued to function as the representative of the Lord throughout these rituals. Once the priesthood had been established by God, Aaron and his sons would take up this role, but they had not yet been

authorized to do so. One does not ordain himself. The slaughter of the animal was to take place, most appropriately, ***“in the Lord’s presence at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.”*** The terminology reinforces the role of the Tabernacle as the dwelling place of God in the midst of the camp. At the same time, it conveys the truth that in order for the priest to be able to enter God’s presence within the sanctuary blood sacrifice had to be offered to cleanse them from the guilt of their own sins. The atoning sacrifice which enabled the priests to stand before the Lord was carried out at the doorway to the Holy Place.

*“The place in which this ritual and the entire ceremony of atonement was carried out, the opening of the Tabernacle, is significant. Here, where Yahweh’s presence met them by appointment, Yahweh would come to grant them authority. Without that authority they could go no further and do nothing more.”* (Durham, p. 395)

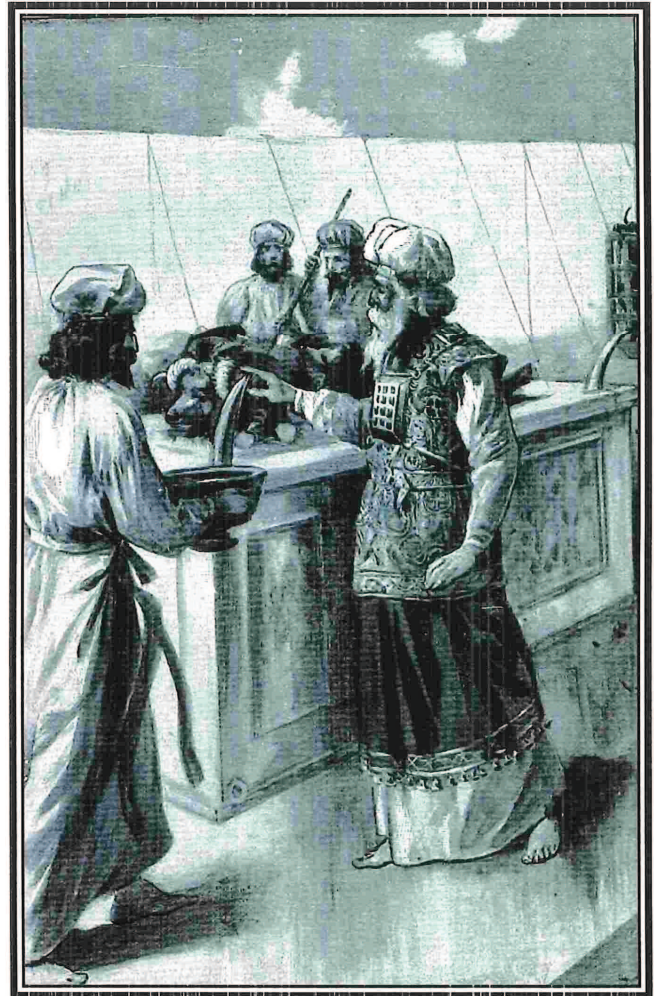
***“Take some of the bull’s blood and put it on the horns of the altar”*** - Blood, as the symbol of life, played a critically important role in Old Testament sacrifices generally, and in the sip offerings particularly. As God explained in Leviticus 17:11 – ***“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood which makes atonement for one’s life.”*** The ***“horns of the altar”*** signified the power and presence of God and were the most holy part of this instrument of sacrifice. Accordingly, Moses’ initial action was to carefully daub the blood upon the altar’s four horns. Having done so, the remainder of the blood which had been drained from the carcass was to be poured out at ***“the base of the altar.”*** Leviticus 8 explained the significance of the ritual as a ceremonial cleansing of the altar so that the subsequent sacrifices performed by the priesthood could be properly carried out upon it: ***“Moses slaughtered the bull and took some of the blood, and with his finger he put it on all the horns of the altar to purify the altar. He poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. So he consecrated it to make atonement for it.”*** (Leviticus 8:15)

***“Then take all the fat around the inner parts...”*** - The remainder of the process followed the pattern that would become standard for the presentation of sin offerings in the temple and the tabernacle. The only digression was that in the case of sin offerings presented on behalf of others, the priests were allowed to retain portions of the meat for themselves. In this instance, however, since the sacrifice was for the sins of the priests the entire carcass, after the removal of the choicest parts which were presented to the Lord upon the altar, was taken outside of the camp and destroyed – ***“But burn the bull’s flesh and its hide and its offal, outside the camp.”*** *“No one was to enjoy eating this bull. Its death was an atoning, sin cleansing death rather than any sort of basis for a fellowship meal.”* (Garland, p. 623) This was also the procedure in sin offerings for offenses of greater magnitude which involved the priesthood or the entire nation (Leviticus 6:23 - 30). The fat and select portions of the inner organs – ***“Take all the fat from around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, and both kidneys with the fat on them and burn them on the altar.”*** - were reserved

to be presented to the Lord upon the altar. Leviticus 3 explained the concept as presenting a sweet savor to God as the smoke from the burning rose up toward heaven:

***“Then Aaron’s sons are to burn it on the altar, on top of the burnt offering, that is, on the burning wood, as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord...The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made to the Lord by fire...The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made by fire, a pleasing aroma. All the fat is the Lord’s. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood.”*** (Leviticus 3:3 - 17, passim)

The fact that the bull's hide and carcass are to be burned ***“outside the camp”*** further indicates the removal of sin and guilt from the people and their priestly representatives. This was also the case in the cleansing ceremony of the Red Heifer (Numbers 19:1 - 10) and the Scapegoat of Yom Kippur –

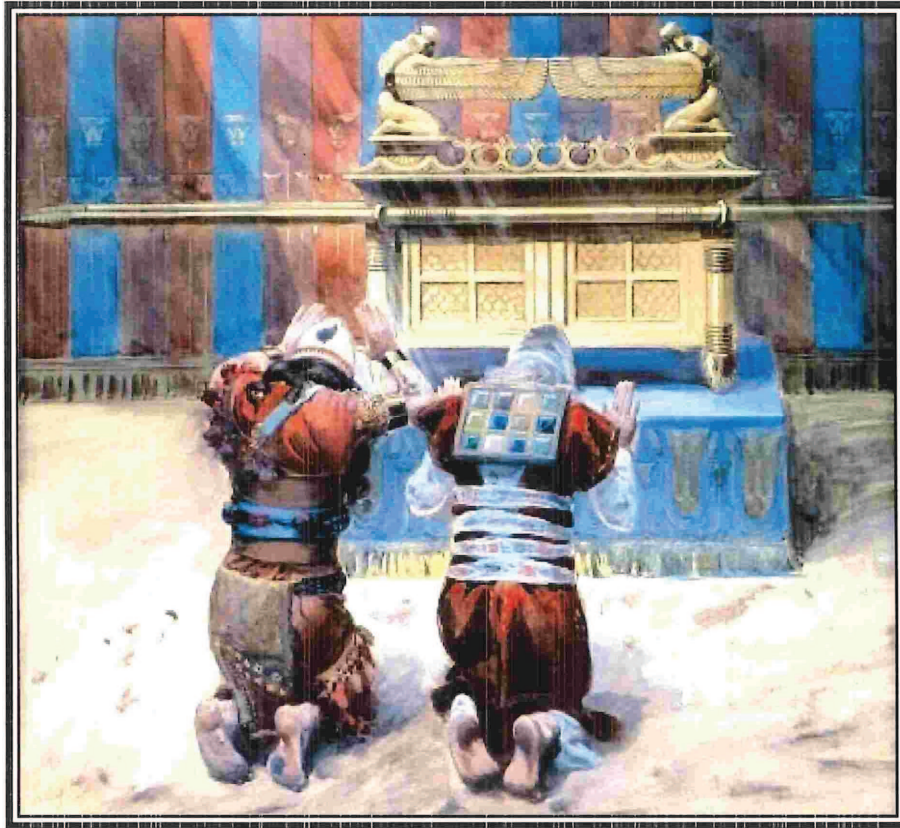


***“Aaron and His Sons Preparing a Burnt Offering Upon the Altar”***

***“When Aaron had finished making atonement for the Holy Place and the Tent of Meeting and the Altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He shall lay both hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the wickedness and the rebellion of the Israelites - all their sins - and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.”*** (Leviticus 16:20 - 22).

It must also be remembered that in this case, the sin offerings were to be repeated throughout seven days. On the eighth day, for the first time, Aaron and his sons made the sacrifices themselves. God endorsed their priesthood as divine fire surged out of the Holy of Holies and consumed the sacrifice on the altar:

***“Moses and Aaron then went into the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people.***



*“Moses and Aaron Before the Ark After the Ordination of the Priesthood” by James Jacques Tissot*

*Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell face-down.” (Leviticus 9:23 - 24)*

### ***Verses 15 - 17***

***Take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. Slaughter it and take the blood and sprinkle against the altar on all sides. Cut the ram into pieces and wash the inner parts and the legs, putting them with the head and the other pieces. Then burn the entire ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the Lord, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the Lord by fire.***

***“Take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands ...”*** - The sin offering of the young bull is to be followed by the burnt offering of the first of the two rams. This was the typical sequence, the burnt offering following the sin offering, when both sacrifices occurred in the same ceremony. The order logically reflected the significance of the two similar, but distinct sacrifices. Alfred Edesheim, in his classic 19<sup>th</sup> century study *The Temple* offered a careful explanation of the difference between the sin offering and the burnt offering. The sin offering was a profoundly solemn occasion, acknowledging the urgent need of the helpless sinner for forgiveness which he could not earn on his own behalf. It marked a starting point, a new beginning:



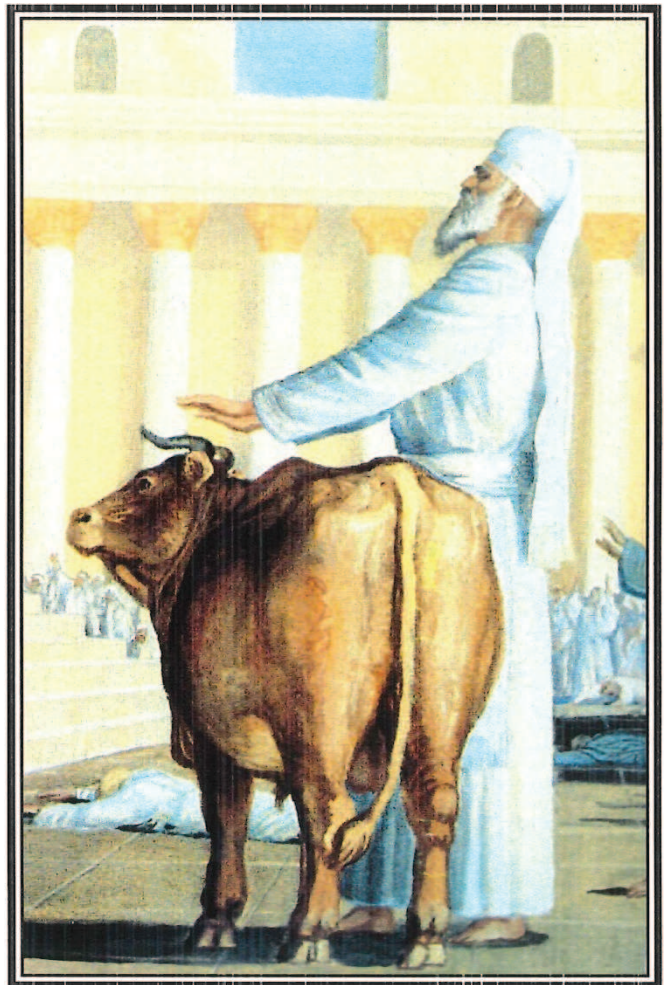
*“The sin offering is the most important of all sacrifices. It made atonement for the person of the offender...Hence sin offerings were brought on festive occasions for the whole people...the sin offering symbolized general redemption...The sin offerings were brought also for purification in such defilements of the body as symbolically pointed to the sinfulness of our nature (sexual defilement, those connected with leprosy, and with death) ...Neither oil nor frankincense were brought with a sin offering. There was nothing joyous about it. It represented a terrible necessity for which God, in His wondrous grace had made provision.” (Edersheim, p. 91 - 92)*

The burnt offering, in contrast, celebrated and affirmed an existing relationship with the Lord. While it also acknowledged the need for forgiveness, signified the total commitment of the sinner to the God who had chosen him and freed him from the curse of sin:

*“The burnt offering symbolized the entire surrender to God, whether of the individual or of the congregation, and His acceptance thereof Hence, also, it could not be offered without the shedding of blood...It meant general acceptance on the ground of previous special acceptance and was therefore a sacrifice of devotion and service. Thus, day by day, it formed the regular morning and evening service in the temple and indicated, as it were, the fullness, richness, and joyousness of their self - surrender.” (Edersheim, p. 90 - 91)*

The Hebrew noun for the burnt offering is “*olah*” which means “*that which ascends by fire*” in reference to the fact that the entire sacrifice was burned and rose to heaven in the billows of smoke which lifted from the flames of the altar. The rising of the smoke The English term “*holocaust*” - is ultimately derived from this word, coming to us by way of a Greek compound which meant to be completely consumed by flames. The burning of the entire carcass represented the total dedication of the worshiper to the Lord.

Once again the ritual began Aaron and his sons placing their hands upon the ram's head to indicate the transference of sin's guilt to the sacrificial offering – ***“And Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head.”***



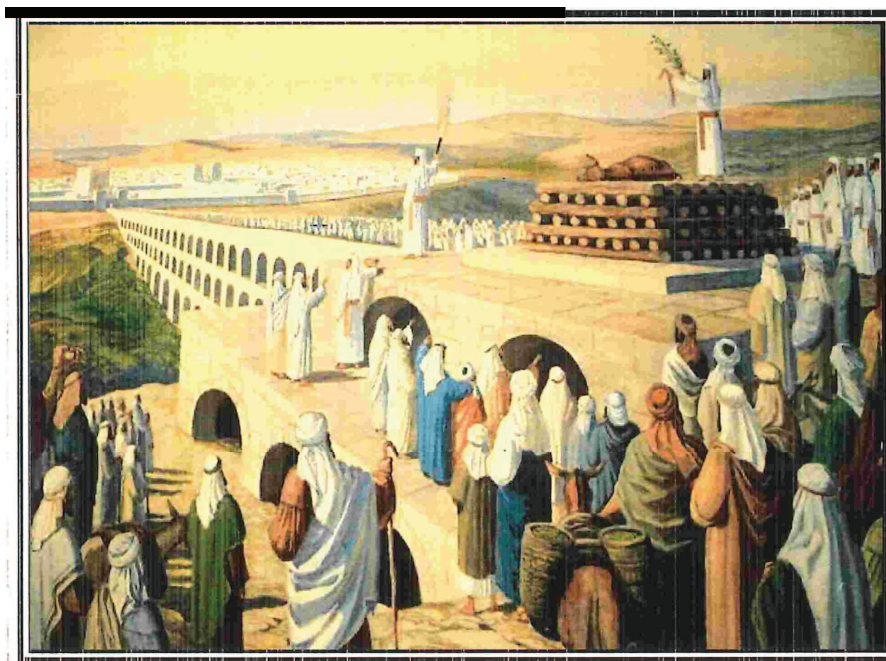
***“The Sin Offering of the High Priest On Yom Kippur”***

The sequence of events, from the sin offering of the bull to the burnt offering of the first ram follows in logical order. That which had been accomplished by the first sacrifice was now to be implemented and applied by the significance of the second offering.

*“The record of this being carried out is found in Leviticus 8:18 - 21. One of the main ideas conveyed by this offering is that of total dedication to the Lord. The priests, having had their sin dealt with, now offer themselves totally to the Lord. As the sacrificial routine was similar in each case, this is the second time that all have participated in laying on their hands.”* (MacKay, p. 494)

**“Slaughter it and take the blood, and sprinkle it on the altar on all sides.”** - Moses, as the officiating officer, was to slit the ram’s throat and drain the blood from the carcass. For the second time, the blood was to be applied to the altar of burnt offerings, albeit in a different manner. The application to the altar’s horns is not repeated. Instead the blood was sprinkled **“against the altar on all sides.”** *“The blood was collected in a vessel and dashed , against the altar from diagonally opposite corners in such a way that each of the two sprinklings spattered two of the sides.”* (Sarna, p. 188)

**“Cut the ram into pieces and wash the inner parts and the legs, putting them with the head and the other pieces.”** - The body of the ram was to be dismembered and cleansed, before it was placed upon the altar for burning. In this way it would be acceptable to be presented to the Lord by fire. **“Then burn the entire ram upon the altar. It is a burnt offering unto the Lord, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the Lord by fire.”** As in the preceding instance, the presentation to the Lord, and His acceptance thereof, are indicated by the smoke rising up into the heavens.



*“The Holocaust Offering of the Red Heifer Offered Outside of Jerusalem” (Numbers 19)*

## **Verses 19 - 21**

***Take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. Slaughter it, take some of its blood and put it on the lobes of the right ears of Aaron and his sons, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. Then sprinkle blood against the altar on all sides. And take some of the blood on the altar and some of the anointing oil and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and on their garments. The he and his sons and their garments will be consecrated.***

***"Take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head."*** The second ram is designated as "the ordination ram" (vs. 27). This title indicates that based upon what has taken place through the two preceding sacrifices, with the completion of the rituals of this sacrifice, Aaron and his sons will actually enter into the priesthood to which God has called them. For the third time, Aaron and his sons are directed to lay their hands upon the animal to be sacrificed, thereby identifying themselves with the ram as their substitute in the ordination ceremony. However, in this instance yet another ceremony linking the priests to the sacrifice is added to the ritual.

***"Slaughter it and take some of its blood and put it on the lobes of the right ears of Aaron and his sons, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet."*** The identification of the sacrificial victim with the priests who will henceforth be offering the sacrifices (which had begun with direct physical contact by the laying on of hands) was dramatically reinforced by the direct application of the ram's blood to their ears, thumbs and toes. The selection of these three representative body parts is symbolically significant.

*"We come now to the most striking part of the ritual; the ram's blood is applied to the priests' right ears, right thumbs, and right big toes, and then to the altar. The emphasis on the right side probably reflects the universal prejudice although Hebrew is far less dextro-centric than, say, English. But why these body parts in particular? First, the practical explanation, the face, hands and feet are the only skin not covered by the sacred vestments. Thus, they may need independent purification. Second, the symbolic; it is through the ears that the priest is instructed in God's will (this is, still, a semi-literate society); it is with his feet that he goes about his holy business; it is with his hands that he executes his sacred office. In other words, the ram's blood purifies the priests' faculties of understanding, locomotion and manipulation." (Propp, p. 530)*

William Propp contends that the placement of the blood upon the priests also signifies the vicarious nature of the ram's death in place of Aaron and his sons.

*"In Israel the Ordination Ram must die so that Aaron and his sons may be born again to priesthood...The bloodied finger, toe and ear symbolizes the priests' death...By undergoing symbolic mutilation, the priests themselves*

*became the living sacrificial victims... With the ordination blood, the priests are branded as Yahweh's own place under his protection.” (Propp, p. 531)*



*“The Angel of Death Passing Over the Households of Israel”*

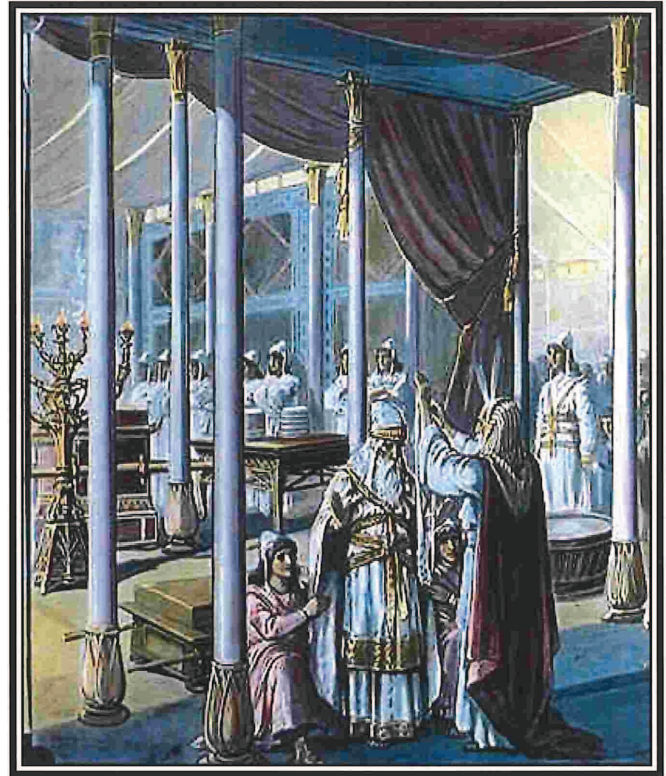
In this way, the ritual would be similar to the death of the Passover lamb who died in place of the firstborn Israelites in Egypt. As the doorposts and lintels of the households were marked with the lambs blood, so the priests being ordained are marked with the blood of the ram. The Lord Himself drew the parallel between the consecration of the Levites to His service and the deliverance of the firstborn in Egypt.

*“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Bring the Tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to assist him. They are to perform duties for him and for the whole community at the Tent of Meeting by doing the work of the Tabernacle. They are to take care of all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the Tabernacle. Appoint Aaron and his sons to serve as priests; anyone else who approaches the sanctuary must be put to death.’ The Lord also said to Moses: I have taken the Levites from among the Israelites in place of the first male offspring of every Israelite woman. The Levites are Mine, for all the firstborn are Mine. When I struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, I set apart for Myself every firstborn in Israel, whether man or animal, they are to be Mine. I am the Lord.” (Numbers 3:5 - 13)*

*“Then sprinkle blood against the altar on all sides.”* The remainder of the blood from the Ordination Ram was sprinkled against the sides of the altar like that of its predecessor. This

application of blood to the altar once again serves to reinforce the concept of presenting the life of the sacrificial animal before the Lord, thereby cleansing the altar itself and those on whose behalf the sacrifice had been presented. The ubiquitous presence of the blood throughout these ceremonies was deliberately intended to confront the congregation with the profound significance of offering an innocent life to redeem the life of the guilty sinner.

*“As the embodiment of the life force, blood is taboo for humans (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:10 - 14; Deuteronomy 12:23). Like suet, it is reserved for God (Leviticus 3:17). Accordingly, it is not sent heavenward as smoke, but deposited on various parts of the Tabernacle, or poured at the altar’s base...Applying it to the altar places the blood within the divine domain...In any case, the gore bespattered ‘mizbeah,’ literally place of slaughter,’ jars the viewer into consciousness of the enormity of taking life.” (Propp, II, p. 461)*



*“The Consecration of Aaron and His Sons”  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration*

***“Then take some of the blood on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it ...”*** - The crucial symbolism continued in the next ceremony of the ritual. A few drops of the sacrificial blood which had been applied to the altar was to be combined with ***“the oil of anointing.”*** The blood/oil was then to be sprinkled over all those who were being consecrated for the Lord’s priesthood: ***“Sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and on their garments. Then he and his sons and their garments will be consecrated.”*** The combination of the oil and the blood represents the setting apart for divine service (consecration) and the cleansing (forgiveness of sins) which makes that service in the Lord's presence possible.

*“Only by mixing the tiny bit of blood into the ample supply of anointed oil would Moses, or the successive officiating high priests, have had enough liquid for the blood actually to reach the bodies and clothing of the priests being ordained. But blood there must be, no matter how small and token the amount. Why? Because it is the death of Christ which qualifies His servants to be holy enough to enter into the work of His ministry, because that death can be signified only by blood, not oil, and because all Old Testament sacrifices point to the ultimate sacrifice of Christ, the sacrifice that actually provides the atonement, to which all previous sacrifices look for their derived validity. In the logic of the Old Testament’s revealed sacrificial system, oil*

*helps signify purity and cleanness, but not forgiveness. The combination of the oil and the blood signify purity of service and forgiveness of sin respectively. Purity and forgiveness made the priests acceptable to God – ‘consecrated’ – meaning holy.” (Stuart, p. 625)*

The text makes this link emphatically clear with the assertion – ***“Then he and his sons and their garments will be consecrated.”*** Note that both the individuals who hold the office and the vestments which represent the office are the objects of the consecration. The reference here is not to the entire sequence of events described in the preceding verses but specifically to the action of sprinkling the vested priests with the combination of blood and oil. *“It is this act, vs. 21 notes precisely, that sets Aaron and his sons and their vestments apart for ministry to Yahweh.” (Durham, p. 395)*

### ***Verses 22 - 26***

***“Take from this ram the fat, the fat tail, the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, both kidneys with the fat on them, and the right thigh. (This the ram for the ordination.) From the basket of bread made without yeast, which is before the Lord, take a loaf, and a cake made with oil, and a wafer. Put all these in the hands of Aaron and his sons and wave them before the Lord as a wave offering., Then take them from their hands, and burn them upon the altar as a burnt offering for a pleasing aroma to the Lord, an offering made to the Lord by fire. After you take the breast of the ram for Aaron’s ordination, wave it before the Lord as a wave offering, and it will be your share.”***

***“Take from this ram the fat..”*** - By and large, the procedure outlined here for the selection and distribution of the various body parts of the second ram reflect the ordinary procedures



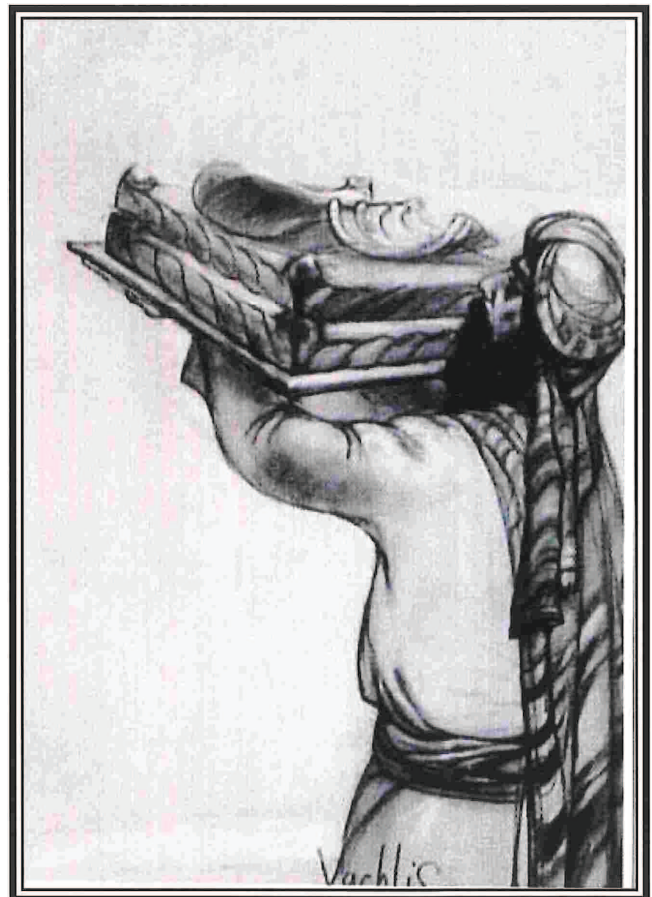
***“A Ram Awaiting Sacrifice In Contemporary Arabia”***

of the Old Testament's sacrificial rituals. As Verses 27 - 28 indicate this will become the standard method of operation. The only unique element here is the addition of ***“a loaf, and a cake made with oil, and a wafer”*** taken from ***“the basket of bread made without yeast, which is before the Lord.”*** As previously noted in regard to the burning of fat from the slaughter of the bull (vs. 13 - p. 1233), the fat represented the choicest, most tender and flavorful parts of the animal, the burning of which would provide ***“the pleasing aroma to the Lord.”*** This procedure was formalized in Leviticus 3:3 - 17

***“Then Aaron’s sons are to burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offering, that is, on the burning wood as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the Lord ... The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made to the Lord by fire ... The priest shall burn them as food, an offering made to the Lord by fire as a pleasing aroma. All the fat is the Lord’s. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live; you must not eat any fat or any blood.”***

Before these offerings were burned upon the altar, they were to be symbolically presented to the Lord as a ***“wave offering.”*** The offerings were held up in the air in front of the altar and then repeatedly raised and lowered. This visual presentation was a prominent part of the ritual of the Tabernacle and later the Temple (cf. Exodus 25:2 - 3; 35:22; 38:4, 29; Leviticus 7:30; 8:27 - 29). It is also called a ***“raised offering”*** or an ***“elevation offering”*** because of the nature of the motion. The Talmud defines the specific motions of the wave offering in this way:

***“You shall then wave it, that is, move it forwards and backwards in all four directions, then upward and downward, submitting it to Me as the Master of the World in all directions. This makes it a wave offering before God. The horizontal movements will neutralize destructive winds, and the vertical movements will neutralize destructive dews.”***  
( Chumash, p. 28)



***“The Presentation of a Wave Offering”***

Following this ritual, the offerings were then burnt upon the altar – ***“Then take them from their hands and burn them upon the altar along with the burnt offering, for a pleasing aroma to the Lord, an offering made by fire.”***

**“After you take the breast of the ram for Aaron's ordination ...”** - The breast meat of the second ram was also to be presented before the Lord as a wave offering. However, it was then to become the portion of the priests – **“those parts of the ordination ram that belong to Aaron and his sons.”** In this instance, it becomes the possession of Moses as the officiating priest. Hereafter, in this type of ritual, it will be the possession of the priesthood – **“to Aaron and his sons.”**



**“The consecration of Aaron and His Sons” 17th Century Bible Woodcut by Weigel**

**“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Anyone who brings a fellowship offering to the Lord is to bring part of it as his sacrifice to the Lord. With his own hands he is to bring the offering made to the Lord by fire; he is to bring the fat together with the breast, and to wave the breast, and wave the breast before the Lord as a wave offering. The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast belongs to Aaron and his sons. You are to give the right thigh of your fellowship offerings to the priest as a contribution. The son of Aaron who**

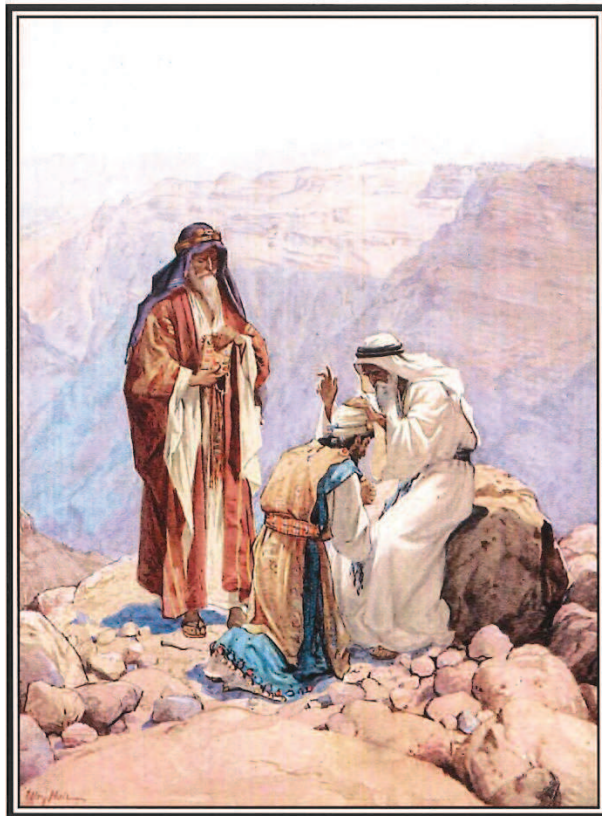
### **Verses 27 - 28**

**“Consecrate those parts of the ordination ram that belong to Aaron and his sons; the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. This is always to be the regular share for Aaron and his sons. It is the contribution the Israelites are to make to the Lord from their fellowship offerings.”**

**“Consecrate those parts of the ordination ram ...”** - This brief paragraph interrupts the flow of instructions for the unique initial ordination ceremony for Aaron and his sons in order to establish a more general guideline which will remain permanently in effect for this type of offering. **“The wave offering given to Moses in the preceding verse is a unique event. From now on, when priests are ordained, and when other ceremonies occur in which wave offerings are used, the wave offerings will be given to the**



*who offers the blood and the fat of the fellowship offering shall have the right thigh as his share. From the fellowship offerings of the Israelites, I have taken the breast that is waved and the thigh that is presented and have given them to Aaron the priest and his sons as their regular share from the Israelites. This is the portion of the offerings made to the Lord by fire that were allotted to Aaron and his sons on the day they were presented to serve the Lord as priests. On the day they were anointed, the Lord commanded that the Israelites give this to them as their regular share for the generations to come.”*



*“The Consecration of Eleazar” by William Hole*

### **Verses 29 - 30**

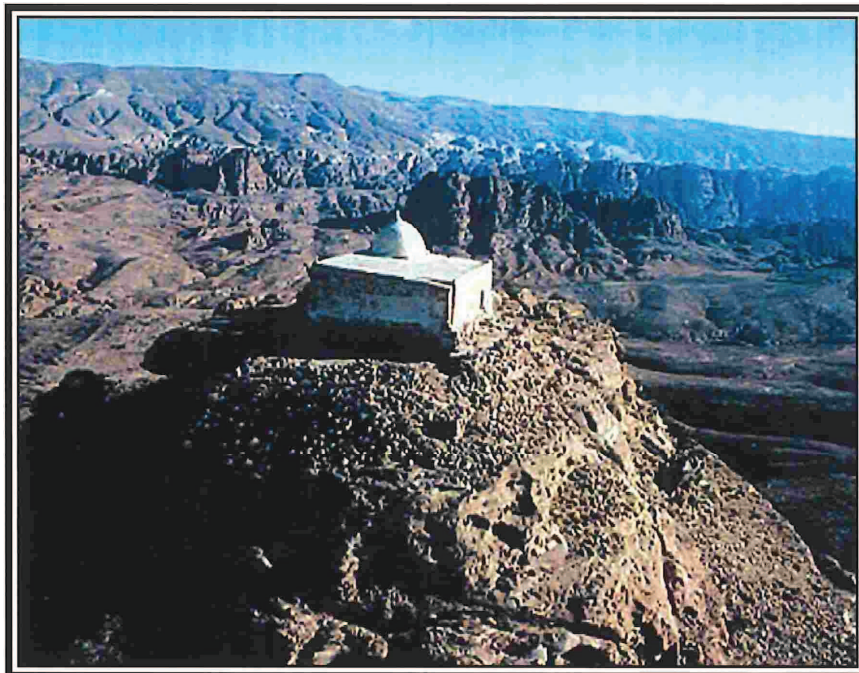
*“Aaron's sacred garments will belong to his descendants so that they can be anointed and ordained in them. The son who succeeds him as priest and comes to the Tent of Meeting to minister in the Holy Place is to wear them for seven days.*

*“Aaron’s sacred garments...”* - The eight garments which constitute the vestments of the High Priest were to be handed down across the generations. The Hebrew text literally identified these robes as *“the holiness garments.”* The Book of Numbers reports that this was the case upon the death of Aaron.

*“Get Aaron and his son Eleazar and take them up Mount Hor. Remove Aaron’s garments and put them on his son Eleazar, for Aaron will be*

*gathered to his people; he will die there. Moses did as the Lord commanded. He went up Mount Hor in the sight of the whole community. Moses removed Aaron's garments and put them on his son Eleazar. And Aaron died there on top of the mountain.”* (Numbers 20:25 - 28)

This process reinforces the crucial significance of the vestments as the hallmarks of the high priestly office which continued throughout the history of tabernacle/temple Judaism. The hereditary possession of the vestments signifies the hereditary succession of the office among the linear descendants of Aaron. Furthermore, for the heir to receive and to wear the same robes which had been worn by his fathers affirms the direct link between each new high priest and all of his predecessors.



*“Mosque Of The Tomb of Aaron Upon Jebel Harun”*

The requirement that the new high priest is to wear the robes of office *“for seven days”* anticipates the week long duration of the ordination ceremony which will be stipulated in the next paragraph. The rabbis debate whether this means twenty - four hours a day or merely while the ceremonies themselves are being conducted. The latter is the majority opinion.

### ***Verses 31 - 34***

*“Take the ram for the ordination and cook the meat in a sacred place. At the entrance to the Tent of Meeting Aaron and his sons are to eat the meat of the ram and the bread that is in the basket. They are to eat these offerings by which atonement was made for their ordination and consecration...But no one else may eat them because they are sacred. And if any of the meat of the ordination ram or any of the bread is left over till morning, burn it up. It must not be eaten because it is sacred.”*

***“Take the ram for the ordination and cook the meat ...”*** - The ordination ceremony included a fellowship meal for the high priest and his colleagues – ***“Aaron and his sons.”*** The meat was to be prepared ***“in a sacred place,”*** that is, within the courtyard of the Tabernacle. The meat was typically boiled and then grilled on the bronze altar of sacrifice for use in such ceremonial meals. The meal itself was held in the courtyard in front of the entrance to the Tabernacle. The purpose of this feast was both to celebrate the covenant which had been established by the sacrificial rituals and to affirm the reality of that fellowship by dining together. A similar covenant meal had taken place at the foot of the mountain with the seventy tribal elders to formalize the establishment of God's covenant with Israel (cf. Exodus 24:5 - 11). Leviticus 22:29 - 30 describes a similar ceremony: ***“When you sacrifice a thank offering to the Lord, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. It must be eaten that same day; leave none of it till morning. I am the Lord.”***

The components of the meal are identified as ***“these offerings by which atonement was made for their ordination and consecration.”*** The basic purpose of these sacrifices had been to remove the barrier of sin which separated the priests from God and would have made it impossible for them to minister in His holy presence. The shed blood of the sacrifices paid the price for the sinfulness of the priests. The Hebrew term ***“kippur”*** means to restore harmony by means of cleansing. The cleansing agent is blood.

*“The traditional ‘atone,’ that is, ‘put atone, reconcile’ places kippur primarily into the realm of social relationships...Its basic meaning, however, is ‘purge’ putting kippur into the realm of ritual purity...On the one hand, within Hebrew kippur is associated with ‘to be pure,’ (Leviticus 12:7 - 8; 14:20, 53; 16:18, 20; Numbers 8:21; Ezekiel 23:46) suggesting a meaning akin to cleanse. Note, too, the parallelism between kippur and ‘to wipe away or erase’ in Jeremiah 18:23. On the other hand, the specific technique of kippur, involves dirtying, that is, smearing blood...Perhaps kippur means not to wipe sins away but to cover them with blood. Although covering over sin is wrong when done by a human (Deuteronomy 13:9; Psalm 32:5; Proverbs 17:9; 28:13; Job 31:33), God may cover over the sin of the otherwise righteous (Psalm 85:3; Nehemiah 3:37). (Propp, II, p. 466)*

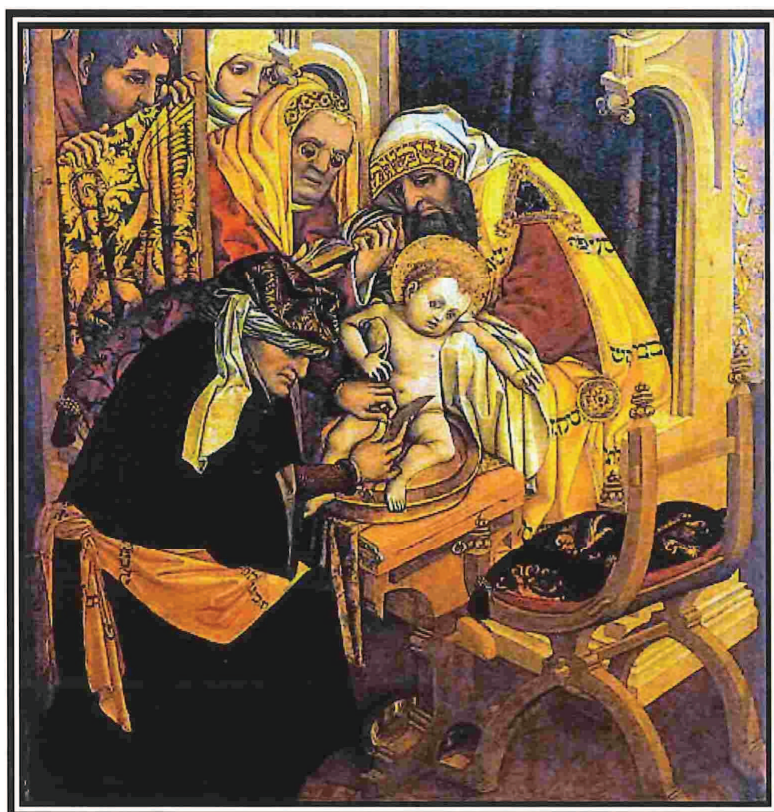
***“But no one else may eat them because they are sacred. And if any of the meat of the ordination ram or any bread is left over till morning, burn it up. It must not be eaten because it is sacred.”*** - Given the role which these sacrifices had played in the cleansing and qualification of the priests, the meal took on profound sanctity and significance. They were therefore to be treated with reverence and respect. Only the priests could partake of them and any leftovers were to be reverently disposed of lest they be abused. In Hebrew the phrase ***“no one else may eat them”*** literally reads – ***“a stranger (or ‘outsider’) may not eat them.”*** This noun is used elsewhere in the Torah to refer to anyone who is not a priest of Tribe of Levi. For example: ***“If a priest’s daughter marries anyone other than a priest***

*(‘a stranger’) she may not eat any of the sacred contributions.*” (Leviticus 21:12; cf. Numbers 1:51; 18:4).

### **Verses 35 - 37**

***Do for Aaron and his sons everything I have commanded you, taking seven days to ordain them. Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement. Purify the altar by making atonement for it, and anoint it to consecrate it. For seven days make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar will be most holy and whatever touches it will be holy.***

***“Do for Aaron and his sons everything I have commanded you ...”*** - The ordination ceremonies and rituals were to be carried out with meticulous care in accordance with the directives of God. Any digression from the divine design would have invalidated the ordination. The foundational importance of the ordination rituals was indicated by the fact that they were to be repeated daily for a complete period of seven days. The seven day duration of the ceremony serves to connect ordination to the other basic rites of passage in Hebrew culture: circumcision was performed on the eighth day ( Genesis 17:12); a marriage celebration continued for seven days (Genesis 29:27); and, the period of mourning following the death of a family member was also seven days (Genesis 50:10). In each instance, the use of the number perfect seven, derived from the seven days of creation, served to symbolize the end of one phase of life and the beginning of another. The

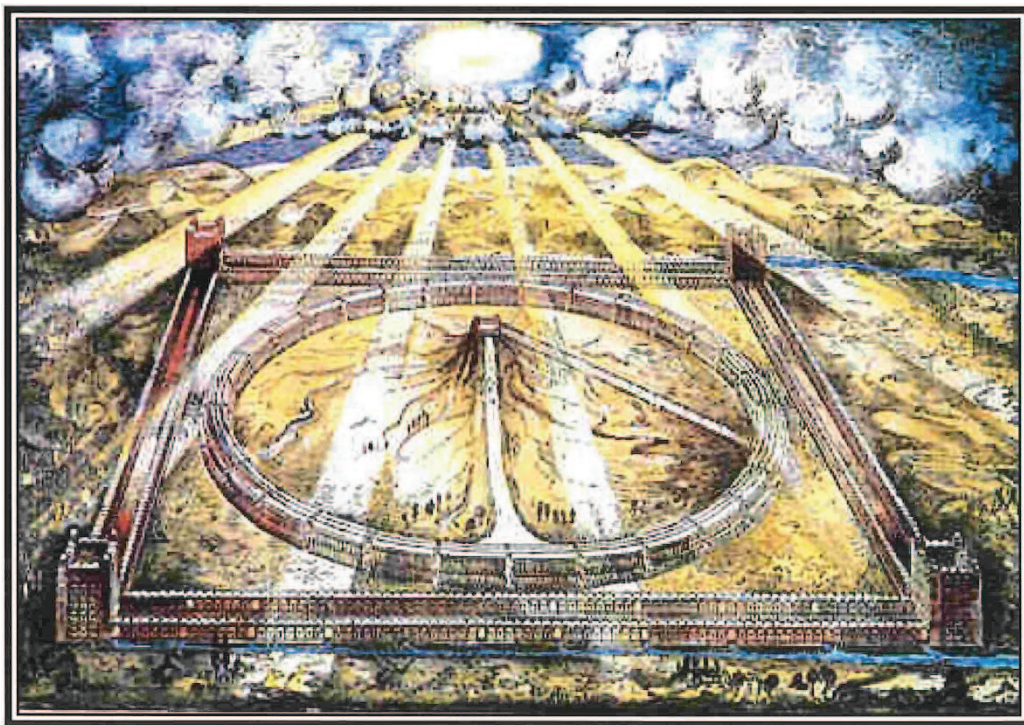


***“The Circumcision of Christ on the Eighth Day”  
Anonymous Medieval Painting***

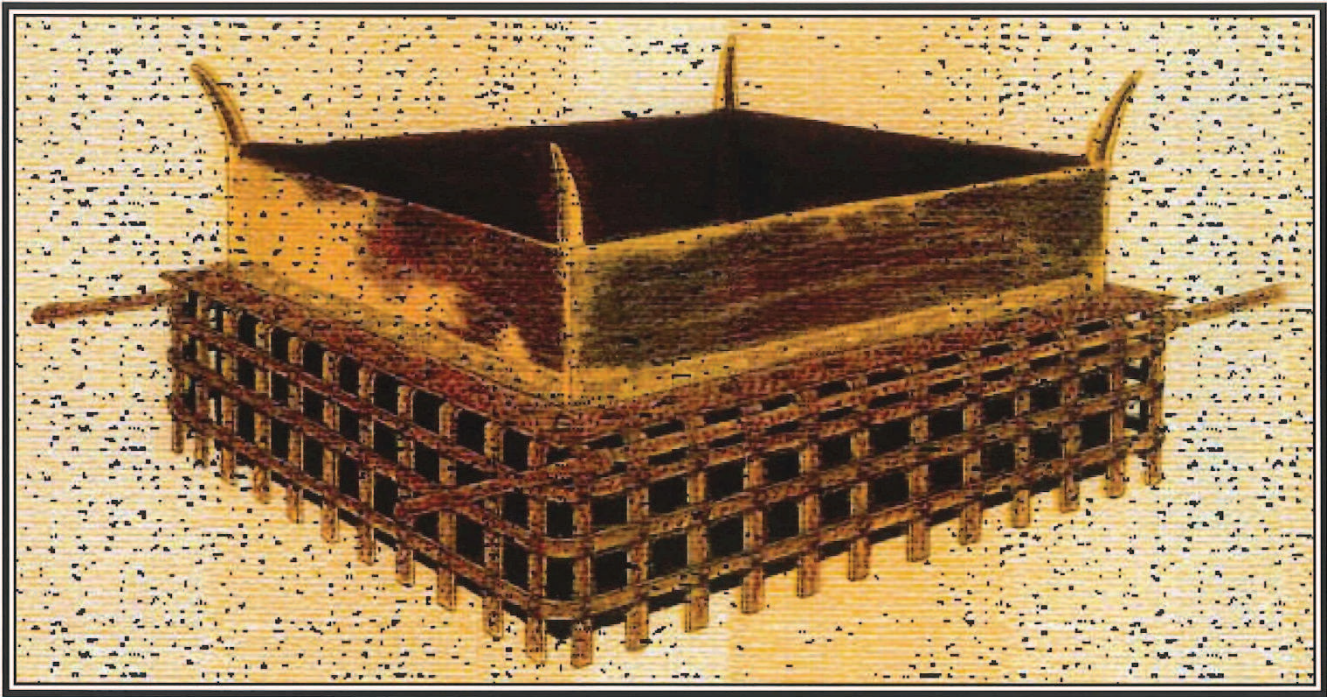
connection between creation and the Tabernacle/Temple is deliberate and of profound theological significance: *“According to 1 Kings 8:65 - 66. 2 Chronicles 7:8 - 9, Solomon dedicated the Temple, which took seven years to build, in a seven day festival in the seventh month...Ezekiel’s temple too, undergoes a seven day consecration...Commentators have noted the manifold ways in which the Tabernacle pericope in Exodus 25 - 31, 35 - 40, evokes the Creation account in Genesis 1:1 - 2:4...We have a pattern of sevens, evoking the seven days of creation. The Tabernacle is ordained in seven speeches (25:1 - 30:10; 30:11 - 16; 30:17 - 21; 30:22 - 33; 30:34 - 38; 31:1 - 11; 31:12 - 17), and in 40:17 - 33,*

*“Moses did as Jahweh commanded him” seven times. As Creation culminates in the Sabbath (Genesis 2:1 - 3), the Tabernacle instructions culminate in the Sabbath (Exodus 31:12 - 17). Exodus 31:17 specifically recalls Creation: ‘In six days Jahweh made the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day, He rested’ Third, there are extensive linguistic contacts between the two narratives...Because we read the Bible forward, first Genesis and then Exodus, we naturally perceive the Tabernacle as recapitulating Creation. The reverse is equally true, even truer. Creation anticipates the Tabernacle. Thus, Pesiq. Rab Kah 1:4: ‘On the day Moses completed erecting the Tabernacle, the world was erected along with it...Before the Tabernacle was erected, the world wobbled; from the instant that the Tabernacle was erected, the world was made firm.’ (Propp, II, pp. 470, 675 - 676)*

***“Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement.”*** - The sin offering of the bull previously specified was to be repeated seven times throughout the week. The sevenfold repetition of the offering would signify the perfection of the atonement which the blood of the sacrifice had achieved. The emphasis in this repetition is that the sin offering of the bull would not only serve to sanctify the priests themselves but the altar of burnt offerings upon which they carried out their ministry. The vision of Ezekiel’s restored temple also included a seven fold consecration of the altar: ***“For seven days you are to provide a male goat daily for a sin offering; you are also to provide a young bull and a ram from the flock, both without defect. For seven days they are to make atonement for the altar and cleanse it; thus they will dedicate it.”*** (Ezekiel 43:25 - 28) The cumulative result of the



*“Ezekiel's Vision of the Temple Sanctuary”*



*“The Bronze Altar of Burnt Offerings”*

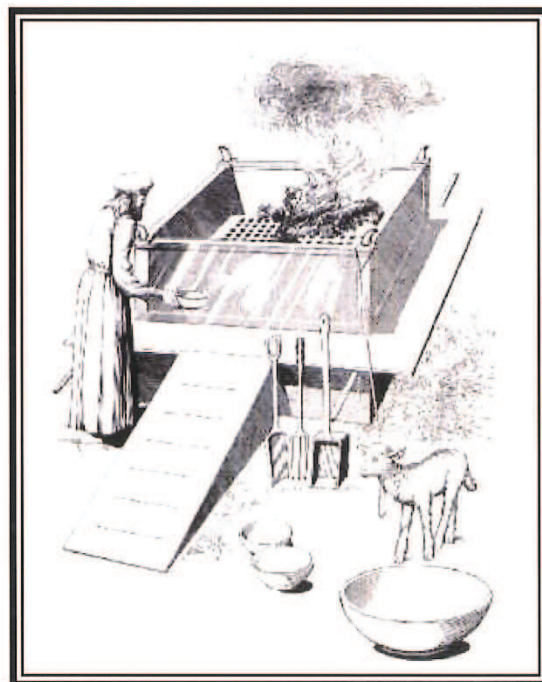
seven sacrifices and anointings would be – ***“Then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be holy.”*** This Hebrew phrase – ***“then the altar will be most holy”*** – is unusual in that it uses the term *“kodesh kodashim”* – *“holy of holies”* which was ordinarily reserved for the innermost sanctuary of the tabernacle/temple in which the Ark of the Covenant rested. The unique use of this language here identifies the altar as the site upon which the blood offerings were made which cleansed sin and thereby enabled man to come before the holy God.

*“Even though it stands outside the Tabernacle, the altar possesses the highest degree of sanctity. It is a link between the contaminated world of ordinary people and Yahweh in purest heaven. This is why a physically defective priest ‘may not enter the Veil nor approach to the altar.’ (Leviticus 12:22) By their quality of ultimate holiness, the Tabernacle and the Altar are able to sustain the weight of Israel’s sins and impurities laid upon them during the sin offerings.” (Propp, II, p. 4 70)*

***“And whatever touches it will be holy.”*** The NIV, like most English translations, misrepresents the meaning of this phrase. The translation ***“it will be holy”*** conveys some sort of magical *“contagious holiness”* by means of which any incidental physical contact with the altar would convey holiness to the impure. Such superstitious nonsense is alien to the Old Testament. Commentator Douglas Stuart correctly asserts: *“There is no automatic transfer of holiness by mere contact with a holy object in the Old Covenant.”* (Stuart, p. 629) Dr. Stuart contended that both the context and the grammar of the phrase required that these words be understood as the straightforward instruction that *“whatever touches it must be holy.”*

Rabbi Moshe Shamah, Director of the Seraphic Institute of New York, recently presented a meticulous study of the four instances (Leviticus 6:11, 20; Exodus 29:37; 30:29) in which this verb **“will be holy”** (Hebrew – “*yikdash*”) appear in the Torah and their interpretation in rabbinic tradition. The rabbi concluded:

*“What do these four clauses - the only ones that contain this expression mandate with the word ‘yiqdash’ as regards coming into physical contact with a sacred item? Does ‘yiqdash’ mean: (a) ‘become holy,’ that is, through physical contact with a holy item sanctity is transmitted to a person or thing, transforming a non-sanctified into a sanctified, or (b) ‘should sanctify himself’ in the sense of purify himself, that is, anyone who intends to or must touch the holy items specified is required to first purify himself or in a slightly different interpretation, already be purified or sanctified...A close reading of the Leviticus 6 context yields compelling arguments that our yiqdash verses do not refer to sanctity contagion and negate the translating of yiqdash as ‘will become holy’ ...Once established that in its two Leviticus attestations yiqdash denotes an aspect of ‘should be in a purified state,’ we assume it should be so translated in its two Exodus contexts also. The first citation, Exodus 29:37 concludes a discussion about the initial sanctification of the priests and of the altar. The last words of the passage are: ‘all who touch the altar yiqdash.’ Up until that last clause of the passage, there had not as yet been any exhortation prescribing the need to interact with the altar only in purity. Had the passage not contained such a law, it would appear to be a glaring omission; thus, that is the most likely meaning of that final clause.” (Shamah, pp. 1,5)*



**“Tabernacle Altar of Burnt Offerings”**



*“Leviticus 9:24 - And the Glory of the Lord Appeared to the People and Consumed the Offering With Fire” Woodcut by Christopher Weigel*

### Verses 38-43

*This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day: two lambs a year old. Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight. With the first lamb, offer a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives, and a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering. Sacrifice the other lamb at twilight with the same grain offering and its drink offering as in the morning - a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the Lord by fire. For the generations to come, this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord. There I will meet you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by My glory.*

*“This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day.” - Having dealt with the consecration of the high priest, the priesthood and the altar of burnt offerings, the Lord proceeded to define the daily routine of Tabernacle worship. Each day would begin and end with the same sacrifices. The offering is identified as “the regular burnt offering *holat ha tamid*.” The Hebrew noun “*holat*” is an offering for sin which is totally burnt by the fire of the altar. “The fourfold mention of the altar in the previous two verses affords*

*appropriate occasion for introducing its primary, permanent function: to accommodate the daily burnt offering. This was the core of the whole sacrificial system.” (Sarna, p. 191) The core of the offerings consisted of a one year old male lamb, a particularly valuable animal which helped to emphasize the significance of the offering.*

*“The rams were to be a year old; newborns would not do. Since sheep lambing takes place in the springtime, the Israelites were required to wait a year or more in many instances, which meant they were virtually always offering a full-grown valuable animal, as opposed to a very young one as in the case of the Passover lamb/goat kid. Every day, two of these valuable animals died, as a reminder of the need for the eventual once for everyone and all time atoning death to cover the sins of the Israelites.” (Stuart, p. 630)*



The burnt offering of the lamb was to be accompanied by ***“a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives.”*** While the ancient units of measure cannot be precisely specified, the consensus is that this would have been about two quarts of flour mixed with a quart of olive oil. A quart of wine was also included in the daily sacrifices. All of these offerings, the lamb, the flour mixed with oil, and the wine, were to be completely consumed by the fire of the altar with nothing set aside for the use of the priests – ***“a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the Lord by fire.”***

***“For the generations to come, this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord.”*** The text place particular emphasis upon the permanence of these daily sacrifices as the defining characteristic of the worship of the Israelite nation. The central significance of the daily morning and evening sacrifices is reflected by the manner in which the prophecies of Daniel and the history of 1 Maccabees presented their interruption by the Greek tyrant Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 167 B.C. as a national calamity and an unprecedented spiritual disaster for God’s people...



***“The Desecration of the Temple by Antioch us IV Epiphanes” by Antonio***

***“Out of one of them came another horn which started out small, but grew in power...It set itself up to be as great as the Prince of the Host; it took away the daily sacrifice from Him, and the place of His Sanctuary was brought low. Because of rebellion, the host of the saints and the daily sacrifice were given over to it. It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground ... His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the Temple fortress, and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then he will set up the abomination that causes desolation...From the time the daily sacrifice is abolished, and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.”***  
(Daniel 8:10 - 12; 11:31; 12:11)

***“Then the king issued a decree throughout his empire: his subject were all to become one people and abandon their own laws and religion. The nations***

*everywhere complied with the royal command, and many in Israel accepted the foreign worship, sacrificing to idols and profaning the Sabbath. Moreover the king sent agents with written orders to Jerusalem and the towns of Judea. Ways and customs foreign to the country were to be introduced. Burnt offerings, sacrifices, and libations in the temple were forbidden; sabbaths and feast days were to be profaned; the temple and its ministers to be defiled. Altars, idols and sacred precincts were to be established, swine, and other unclean beasts to be offered in sacrifice. They must leave their sons uncircumcised; they must make themselves in every way abominable, unclean and profane, and so forget the law and change all their statutes. The penalty for disobedience was death...On the fifteenth day of the month Kislev in the year 145 (167 B.C.) the abomination of desolation was set up on the altar. Pagan altars were built throughout the towns of Judea, incense was offered at the doors of houses and in the streets. All the scrolls of the law which were found were torn up and burnt. Anyone discovered in possession of a Book of the Covenant, or conforming to the Law was put to death by the king's sentence...On the twenty - fifth day of the month, they offered sacrifice upon the pagan altar which was on top of the altar of the Lord.” (1 Maccabees 1:4 1- 59, passim)*

***“For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord.”*** - The location for the ongoing daily offerings is specified as ***“the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord.”*** The sacrifices, as previously noted (vs.38), took place upon the Altar of Burnt offerings which was situated directly in front of the entrance to the Tabernacle. The repetition of the location here served to introduce the emphatic assurance of God’s indwelling among His people within the Tabernacle in the following paragraph. The identification of the Tabernacle as ***“the Tent of Meeting”*** occurs thirty times in the Book of Exodus and frequently throughout the balance of the Torah. While revealing the design of the Ark of the Covenant, God had promised Moses: ***“There I will meet with you, and I will impart to you - from above the cover, from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the Covenant - all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people.”*** (Exodus 25:21) The only use of the designation in Exodus which does not refer to the Tabernacle comes in the aftermath of the Golden Calf apostasy when Moses was instructed to erect a tent outside of the camp where God would continue His unique relationship with Moses. The deliberate placement of this tent outside the camp was designed to express His estrangement from the nation which had betrayed and disobeyed Him.

***“Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp, some distance away, calling it ‘the tent of meeting.’ Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses as he entered the tent. As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud***



*"The Pillar of Fire Before Moses' Tent of Meeting" by Ted Larson*

*would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide, Joshua son of Nun, did not leave the tent." (Exodus 30:7 - 11)*

*"There I will meet with you and speak to you..."* - The Lord proceeded to define the nature of His presence within the Tabernacle and its services as the sole basis for the sanctity of this place and the activities which occurred there. This summary was to serve as a restatement of the fundamental nature and purpose of the sanctuary and its services as the manner in which God had chosen to graciously dwell in the midst of His people, to communicate with them, and to convey to them the forgiveness of sins which would ultimately be accomplished in the promised Messiah.

*"The wealth of detail concerning the physical structure of the Tabernacle, its constitutive elements, and its rituals and practitioners may tend to obscure its original higher purpose. Therefore, the Chapter closes with an emphatic reaffirmation of its religious and spiritual content, values, and meanings." (Sarna, p. 192)*

The verbs **“meet”** and **“dwell”** occur six times in this summary statement to stress with unmistakable clarity the unique blessing which God has bestowed upon Israel. The Ark of the Covenant within the Tabernacle/Temple’s Holy of Holies would literally be the dwelling place of God on earth. Dr. John Currid aptly identified this concept as *“the Immanuel principle,”* using the Messianic title Immanuel (God With Us) subsequently revealed by the prophet Isaiah:

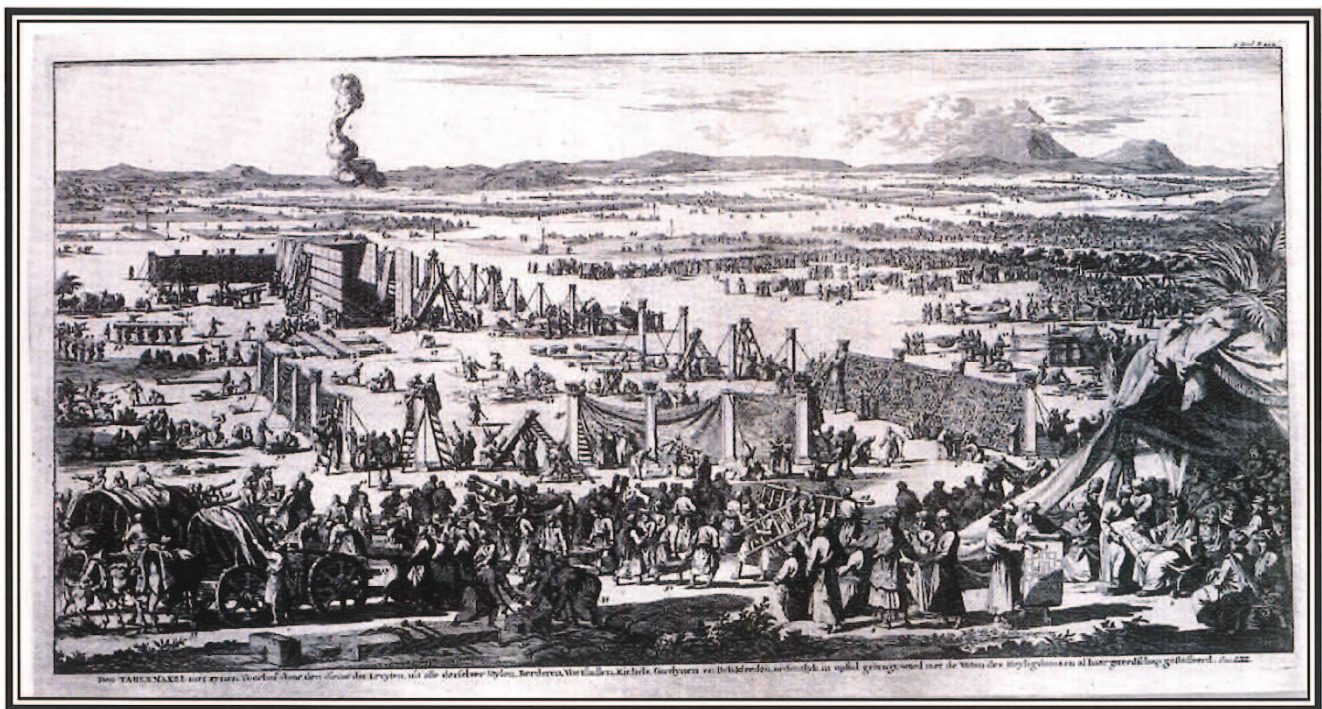
***“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel...Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle and be shattered! Prepare for battle and be shattered! Devise your strategy; but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us...For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne over his kingdom, upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. (Isaiah 7:13 - 14; 8:9 - 10; 9:6 - 7)***

### ***Verses 44 - 46***

***“So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve Me as priests. Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.”***

***“So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting...”*** - The profound implications of God’s presence in the midst of Israel are spelled out in precise detail. In the immediate context, the most direct result of God’s holy presence will be the sanctification of the Tabernacle and the priests whom He has chosen to serve Him therein: ***“The place will be consecrated by My Glory. So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests.”*** All that which the Tabernacle demonstrated as the visible assurance of God’s covenant with Israel, and everything which was accomplished through the rituals and sacrifices of the Tabernacle for the forgiveness of sins was the result of God’s gracious presence and the promises which He had chosen to bestow upon His people. The affirmation of the divine presence is the point and the purpose of all of the ceremonies and services which consecrated the sanctuary, its furnishings and its priesthood. The elaborate detail in which these services are commanded often tends to overwhelm the modern reader who fails to recognize their critically important point and purpose. Commentator John Durham does not exaggerate in the least in his sweeping summary of meaning of this crucial segment of Exodus:

"The authority for the ordination of Aaron and his sons, declared in one way or another in nearly every verse of Chapter 29, is Yahweh at hand. In the place appointed for the ceremony, in the rituals of vesting, anointing, atonement, and offering in the ordination of Aaron and his sons, in the altar and its horns that receive the wholly burned offerings and the blood, in the gifts of the herd and the flock, the grain and grape and olive harvests, in all the movements and these rituals, and certainly in any words spoken with those movements, Yahweh's presence was celebrated and confessed. With the sprinkling upon Aaron and his vestments and his sons of the Oil of Anointment and the blood of the Ram of Ordination, a rite that could only be authorized by Yahweh, and the consummating rite of ordination, Yahweh's presence as asserted. With the presentation of Aaron and his sons as an offering symbolically given, Yahweh, the recipient of the gift and the object of the priestly ministry, was known to be near. In the holiness of the remaining foodstuffs, of the vestments, and of the Altar, Yahweh's presence was declared. And so that this point might be unmistakable, the summary of Chapter 29 and of all the chapters preceding it states clearly that through the knowledge of Israel that He is present, Israel is to know that Yahweh is their God." (Durham, p. 397)

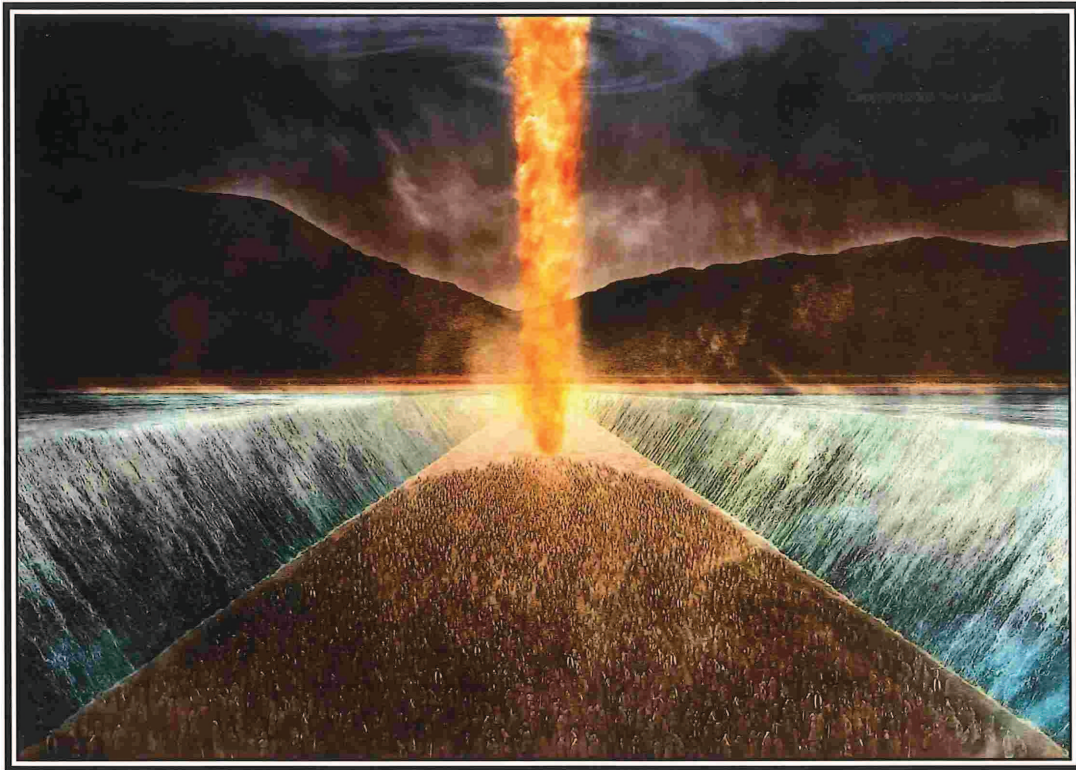


*"The Erection of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness" – 18<sup>th</sup> Century German Bible Illustration*

***"Then I will dwell among the Israelites and I will be their God."*** This place and these rituals, unlike the superstitions of the nations which surrounded Israel, possessed no power of their own which somehow enabled the people to control or manipulate their God. His presence here was at His initiative and on His terms. The divine presence within the

Tabernacle in the midst of the Israelite encampment was the assurance that He would fulfill His promises to the people whom He had graciously chosen to play a unique role in His plan for the salvation of mankind.

*“The Tabernacle, as such, possesses no innate sanctity, nor does the regimen of ritual produce it. No efficacious magic derives from them. The sacred status of the priests and of the edifice, with its furniture and utensils, flows solely from the divine will.”* (Sarna, p. 192)



*“The Pillar of Cloud and Fire at the Red Sea” by Larson*

***“They will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.”*** - Up to this point, Israel had seen the Glory of the Lord in the Pillar of Fire and Cloud which had led them to Sinai, and the fiery clouds which had cloaked the summit of the mountain. But those days were nearly over and then the Tabernacle, with the Lord enthroned between the cherubim over the Ark would become the site of God’s visible presence among His chosen people. That presence would serve as a constant, visible reminder of the covenant relationship which God had established with them. The language here closely parallels God’s original assertion of the nature of the covenant to Moses:

***“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with mighty acts***

*of judgement. I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land that I swore with an uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.”* (Exodus 6:6 - 8)

The theme – **“they will know that I am the Lord”** - is one of the foundational concepts which persists throughout the Book of Exodus. There is a great deal more involved in this knowing than mere intellectual knowledge. This is a relational truth - exactly like the faith of the believer today - which involves a vital combination of intellectual knowledge, submission and trust.

*“Knowledge had played a significant role in the presentation of God’s action in Exodus. Here it is not just intellectual acknowledgement of what the Lord has done that is involved, but the acceptance by the covenant vassal that the Lord has rightfully established a claim to his loyalty and obedience by the deliverance that He provided. The full dimensions of this deliverance are attested by the Divine presence in the Sanctuary. Yahweh has delivered His people and does not live remote from them but in their midst.”* (Mackay, II, p. 501)



*“The Destruction of Pharaoh and His Host at the Red Sea”*

The deliverance from Egyptian bondage, the plagues which humbled the false gods of Egypt, and the miracles - beginning with the destruction of mighty Pharaoh and his host at the Red Sea - which brought Israel to Sinai, sustained them throughout the wandering in

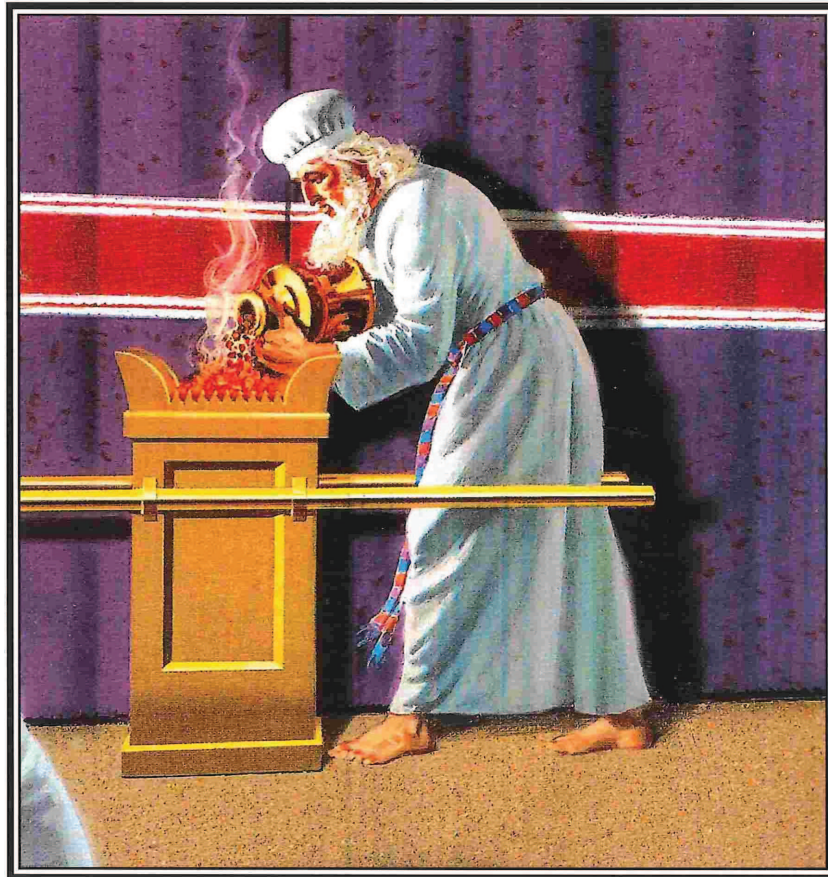
the wilderness, and enabled them to take possession of the Promised Land, will be constantly reiterated by the prophets throughout the balance of the Old Testament as the fundamental evidence of God's commitment to the Children of Israel as His own covenant people. It is most significant to note that all of this was God's doing, at His initiative. God chose Israel. They did not choose Him. God did what had to be done to make this covenant a reality. Israel's response, from the very beginning, was doubt, defiance, and disobedience.

***“I Am the Lord their God...I Am the Lord their God.”*** - The deliberate, emphatic repetition of the divine name ***“I Am”*** (*“Yahweh”*) is, at the same time, an unequivocal assertion of monotheism in a universally polytheistic or pantheistic world. ***“I Am”*** identifies God as the one and only independent existence, who has always been and will always be. The Biblical concept of God, as the one source of everything else that exists, precludes the possibility of poly or pan theism. In the modern Western world, where monotheism has predominated for thousands of years, the necessity for this assertion is often overlooked.

*“Virtually all those gathered at Sinai had grown up as polytheists, pantheists and syncretists in Egypt - just as they would have if they had grown up anywhere else in the ancient world, for that matter. They had little difficulty in believing that there could be a god named Yahweh who was one of many gods and goddesses. But to believe that He was the only God, superior to the most powerful gods they had once believed in, the Creator of the world and their Creator as a people through many miracles - that was harder for them. Sixty - eight times in the Old Testament, God told His people that He wanted them to ‘know that I am Yahweh.’ This was a different concept from knowing that Yahweh existed; it was a sort of semantically loaded shorthand for the assertion: ‘Know that I, who created and control all things, and have all power and have been providing all these supernatural blessings for you that you have been witnessing, am Yahweh - there is no other god doing these things, but only Me, Yahweh. Give up your polytheism, pantheism and syncretism and believe that I am the only God, and place your full faith in Me, obeying My covenant”* (Stuart, pp. 631 - 632)

The innumerable assertions throughout the Old Testament that the one God is a ***“jealous God”*** - (***“Do not worship any other God, for the Lord whose name is ‘Jealous’ is a jealous God.”*** - Exodus 34: 14) make exactly the same point, expressing the unwillingness of God to tolerate sinful man's inherent inclination to *“have it both ways”* – acknowledging God along with an endless variety of imaginary deities which he has devised for himself. No concession to the syncretism of the surrounding nations would be tolerated. Those who would worship the true God must worship Him alone rejected every other deity as false, a delusion of Satan or a figment of man's own imagination.





*“Burning Incense Upon the Incense Altar Before the Curtain”*

## *Exodus Chapter 30*

*[1] Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. [2] It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high - its horns of one piece with it. [3] Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it. [4] Make two gold rings for the altar below the molding - two on opposite sides to hold the poles used to carry it. [5] Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. [6] Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony - before the Atonement Cover that is over the Testimony - where I will meet with you. [7] Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. [8] He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the Lord for generations to come. [9] Do not offer on this altar any other incense or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour a drink offering on it. [10] Once a year, Aaron shall make atonement on its horns. This annual atonement must be made with the blood of the atoning sin offering for the generations to come. It is most holy to the Lord. [11] Then the Lord said to Moses, [12] “When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. [13] Each one who crosses over to those who are already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary*



*“The High Priest Making an Incense Offering  
Within the Tabernacle Sanctuary”*

*shekel which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the Lord. [14] All who cross over, those twenty years old and more, are to give an offering to the Lord. [15] The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the Lord to atone for your lives. [16] Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the Tent of Meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord, making atonement for their lives.” [17] Then the Lord said to Moses, “Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand for washing. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and put water in it. [19] Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. [20] Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die. Also when they approach the altar to minister by presenting an offering made to the Lord by fire, [21] They shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not*

*die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come.” [22] Then the Lord said to Moses, [23] “Take the following fine spices: 500 shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much (that is, 250 shekels) of fragrant cinnamon, 250 shekels of fragrant cane, [24] 500 shekels of cassia - all according to the sanctuary shekel - and a hin of olive oil. [25] Make these into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. It will be the sacred anointing oil. [26] Then use it to anoint the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Testimony, [27] the Table and all its articles, the Lampstand and its accessories, the Altar of Incense, [28] the Altar of Burnt Offering and all its utensils, and the Basin with its stand. [29] You shall consecrate them so that they will be most holy, and whatever touches them will be holy. [30] Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so that they may serve Me as priests. [31] Say to the Israelites, ‘This is to be My sacred anointing oil for the generations to come. [32] Do not pour it on men’s bodies, and do not make any oil with the same formula. It is sacred, and you are to consider it sacred. [33] Whoever makes perfume like it, and whoever puts it on anyone other than a priest, must be cut off from his people.’” [34] Then the Lord said to Moses, “Take fragrant spices - gum, resin, onycha and galbanum - and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, [35] and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer.*

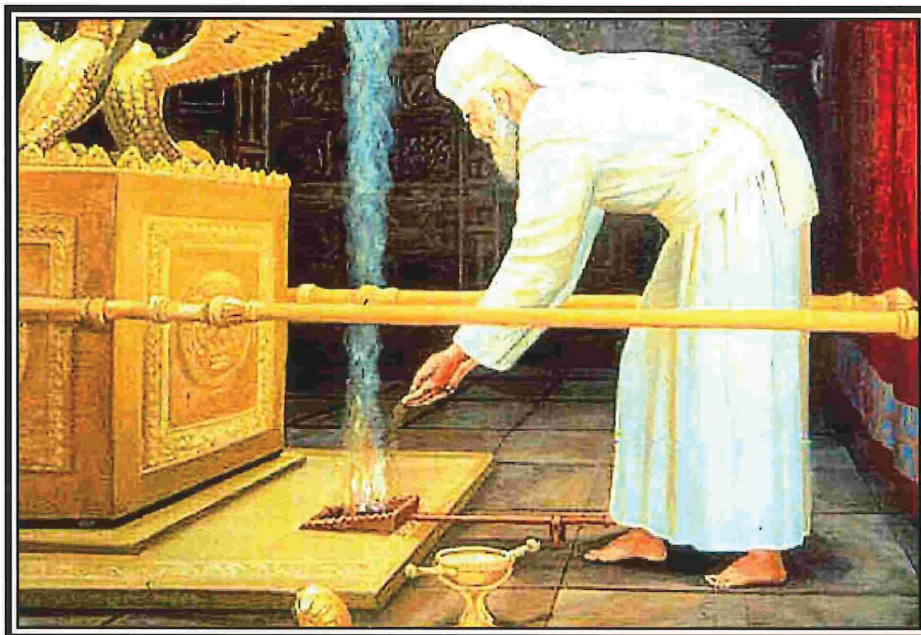
*It is to be salted and pure and sacred. [36] Grind some of it to powder, and place it in front of the Testimony, in the Tent of Meeting, where I shall meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. [37] Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the Lord. [38] Whoever makes any like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from his people.”*

### **Verses 1 - 6**

*“Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high - its horns of one piece with it. Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a ring of gold molding around it. Make two gold rings for the altar below the molding - two on opposite sides - to hold the poles used to carry it. Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the Ark of the Testimony - before the Atonement Cover that is over the Testimony - where I will meet with you.”*

*“Make and altar of acacia wood for burning incense.”* - The instructions for the ministry of the anointed priesthood in the holy presence of the Lord continue in Chapter 30 with detailed instructions for liturgical use of the incense altar within the sanctuary. The incense altar was the only furnishing of the Holy Place which had not been included in the original design statement in Chapter 25, although incense was mentioned among the gifts which the people were invited to bring for the construction of the Tabernacle (cf. Exodus 25:6). Nahum Sama explained the absence of the Incense Altar in the instructions given in connection with the consecration of the priesthood in this way:

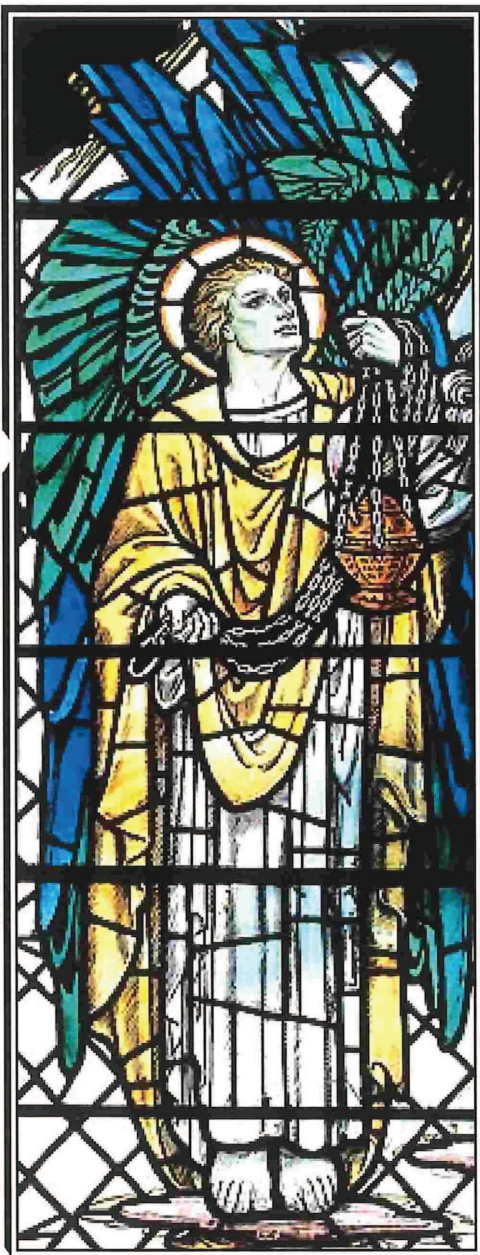
*“The Cloud of Glory is said to descend upon the Tabernacle and to suffuse it*



*“The High Priest Filling the Holy of Holies With an Incense Cloud”*

*only after the structure is entirely completed and only after the seven days of ceremony. That phenomenon expresses divine satisfaction and acceptance of the shrine and signifies its divine legitimation as a house of worship. Hence it would have been premature to produce the cloud of incense at the installation of the priesthood.” (Sama, p. 193)*

The fragrant cloud of incense was perceived as a reminder of the presence of God within the sanctuary. This symbolism was most prominent on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The High Priest was instructed to fill the Holy of Holies with a thick cloud of fragrant smoke to shroud the Ark of the Covenant and shield the priest from the direct vision of God’s glory:



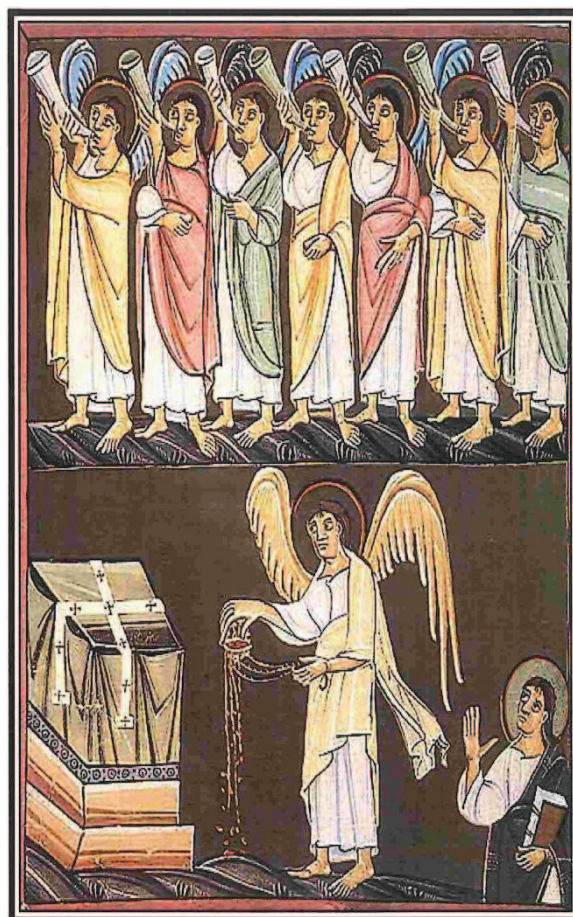
*“The Angel With the Golden Censer”*

*“He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the Lord, and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. He is to put the incense on the fire before the Lord, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the Atonement Cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die.” (Leviticus 16:12 - 13)*

Earlier in the same Chapter the Lord had explained the unique sanctity of the Holy of Holies in terms of His presence above the Ark: *“Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the Atonement Cover upon the Ark, or else he will die because I appear in the cloud over the Atonement Cover.”* (Leviticus 16:2)

At the same time, the smoke of the incense altar, rising up toward heaven represented the prayers and petitions of God’s people ascending before His heavenly throne. Thus the Psalmist declared: *“Let my prayer rise before Thee as incense; the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”* (Psalm 141:2) This thought is reflected in Luke 1:10: *“and when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.”* The most direct identification of incense with the prayers of the faithful is included in the visions of Revelation. First in Revelation 5:8 as the Lamb of God is presented upon the Throne with the authority to open the scroll with seven seals. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before Him in adoration and praise: *“And when He*

*had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty - four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” Subsequently, with opening of the seventh seal, the incense of prayer appeared again: “Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand.” (Revelation 8:3 - 4)* In this context, the placement of the Incense Altar directly before the curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies and the Ark would have been most appropriate.



*“Medieval Bible Illumination of the Angel Burning Incense Before the Heavenly Altar”*

The great medieval Rabbi Maimonides taught that the purpose of the offerings burnt upon Incense Altar was to cover over the offensive smell of the numerous animal sacrifices:

*“Since many animals were slaughtered in the sacred place each day, their flesh butchered and burnt and their intestines cleaned, its smell would doubtless have been like the smell of a slaughterhouse...Therefore, God commanded that the incense be burned twice a day, each morning and afternoon, to lend a pleasing fragrance to the Holy Temple and to the garments of those who served in it.” (Killian, p. 15)*

The foul odors of the animal offerings, it was taught, represented the evil inclinations of man’s animal nature, selfishness, greed and lust while the sweet smell of the incense signified the subjugation of man’s sinful self to the will and purpose of God. The rabbis teach that the location of the Incense Altar within the Holy Place played a uniquely important role in the worship of Israel.

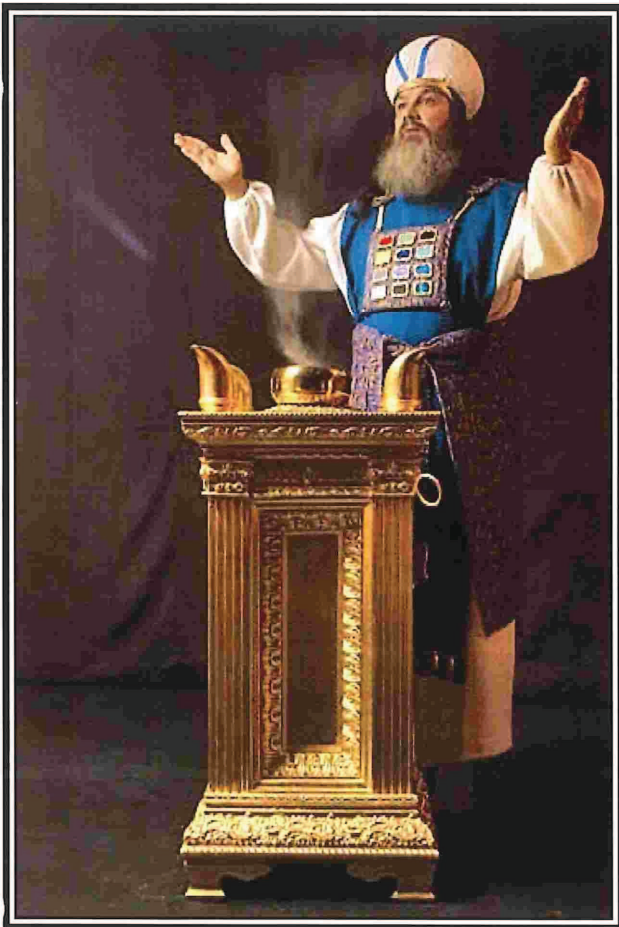
*“Rabbi Shimon said; If only men knew how exalted the section dealing with the incense offering was in the eyes of the Holy One, blessed be He, they would take each single word and make it an ornament for their heads, like a crown of gold. And whoever wishes to study it should examine every detail. And if he*

*concentrates upon it every day he will have a share both in the world to come and in this world. Pestilence will disappear from him, and he will be delivered from all the evil judgements of this world, from evil powers, from the judgements of this world, and from the judgement of the alien kingdom.”* (Killian, p. 16)

*“Thus we learn that the Incense Altar was the most important feature of the Holy Place. The details of the construction of the Incense Altar are provided in Exodus 30. The details of its construction are given after all of the other furniture in the Tabernacle. This placement is to teach us that nothing is so important as the incense. The incense has extremely high status.”* (Killian, p. 17)

The rabbis further contend that this unique role was the primary reason why the Incense Altar was described separately from the other furnishings of the Holy Place.

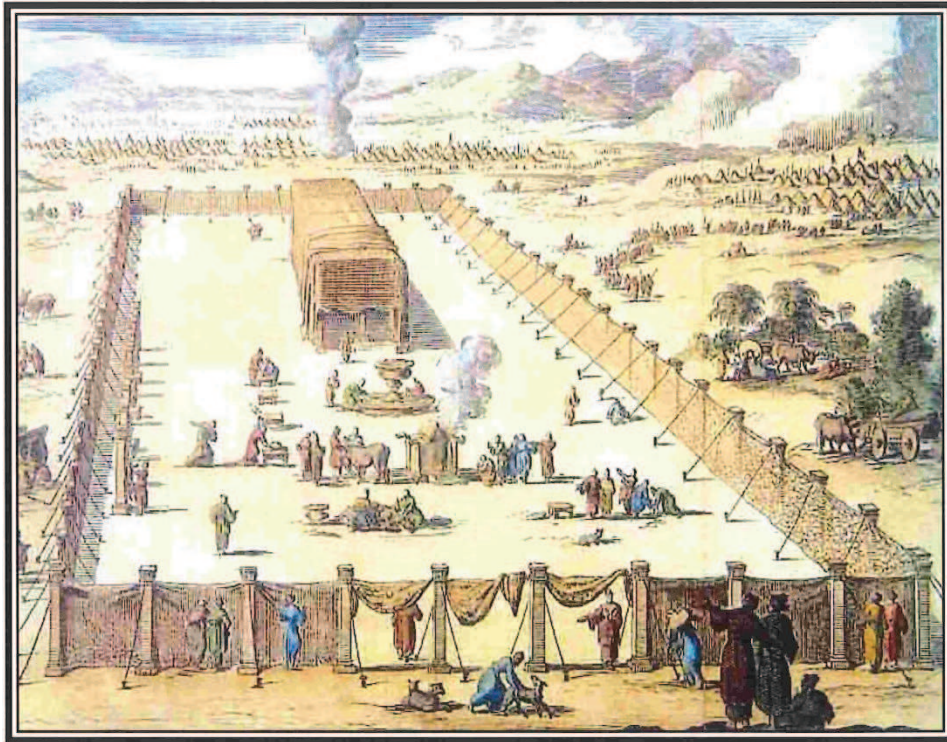
*“Another reason for placing the passage about the Incense Altar here, at the very end of all the discussions pertaining to the Tabernacle and all that was in it, is that this indicates*



*“The High Priest At The Incense Altar”*

*that this Altar has a unique significance, above and beyond all the other furnishings of the Tabernacle. What was different about this Altar was that every other rite that was performed in the Tabernacle had spectators. When the incense was burned on the Incense Altar, however, there was no one present - only the priest burning it and God Himself. In fact, our sages point out that even the angels could not be present in the Sanctuary when the incense was burned. Furthermore we are taught that it was specifically this private service that caused the Divine Presence to be most manifest in the Tabernacle.”* (Chumash, p.232)

The Incense Altar is also identified as **“the Altar of Gold”** - in contrast to the bronze Altar of Burnt Offerings - and **“the Inner Altar”** emphasizing it’s location within the Sanctuary in contrast to the Altar of Burnt Offerings outside in the courtyard. Some question the application of the word **“Altar”** in this context since the Hebrew word **“mizbeah”** literally

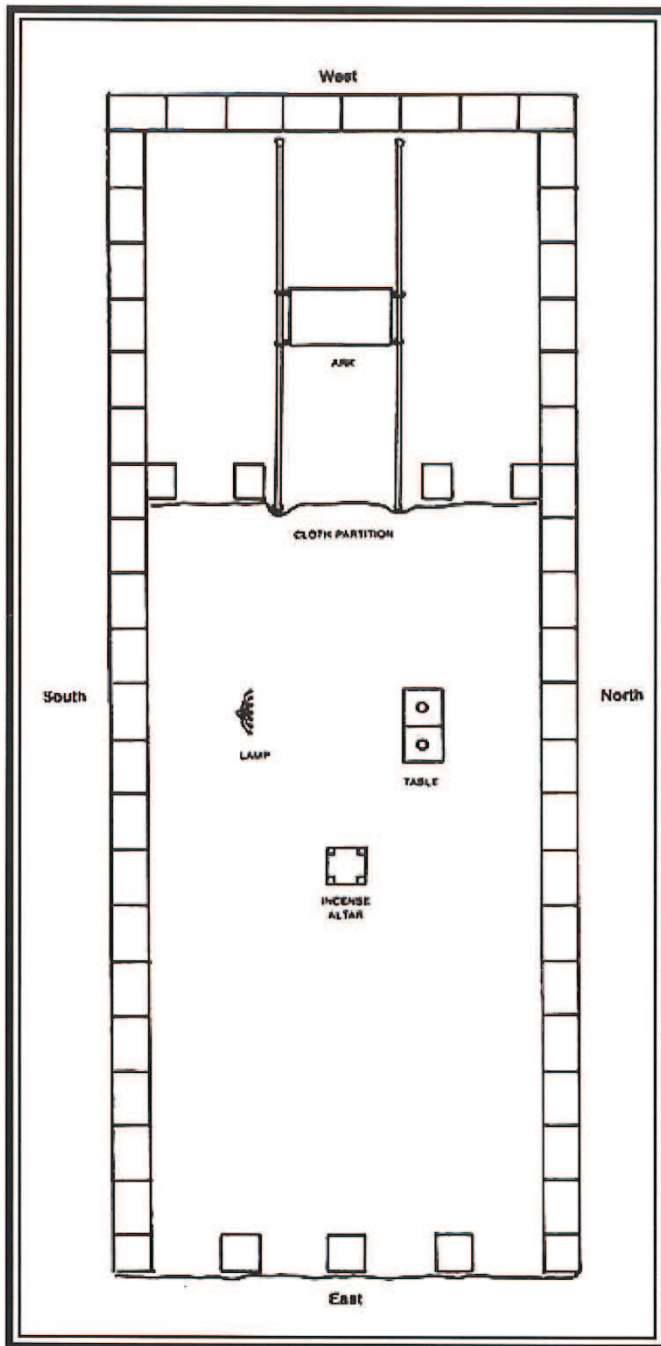


*“17<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving of the Tabernacle”*

means *“a place of slaughter.”* It would seem that the atypical use of the term in reference to the Incense Altar is intended to establish the link between this altar and its larger counterpart in the courtyard. God's acceptance of the animal sacrifices burnt upon the great altar was frequently expressed in the terminology of *“a sweet smelling aroma”* – ***“Then burn the entire ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the Lord, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the Lord by fire.”*** (Exodus 29: 18)

*“The fact that the incense altar is called an altar clearly links it with the other altar in the courtyard. There, the smoke of the sacrifices ascended heavenwards. What is now given is a representation of what happens when the smoke reaches the throne room of God. It is pleasant and accepted. Inasmuch as incense was associated with the offering of prayer (cf Psalm 141:2), the prayers for acceptance and fellowship accompanying the sacrifices were shown as reaching the Lord and being favorably received.”*  
(Mackay, p. 503)

***“It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide”*** - The size and design of the Incense Altar made it clear that it was not intended to serve as a fire pan upon which offerings were to be burnt. It was basically a small square table (18” by 18”) standing 35” high. The materials used in its construction were acacia wood which had been covered in fine gold. The customary features of an altar, horns and a decorative golden molding, were added to signify its role and purpose – ***“its horns of one piece with it. Overlay the top and all the sides, and the horns with pure gold and make a gold molding around it.”*** Like the other furnishings of the Tabernacle, the Incense Altar was designed to be portable. Hence, rings



*Diagram of the Tabernacle Layout Based On the Descriptions of the Talmud*

*Atonement Cover that is over the Testimony.” (Stuart, p. 634)*

for carrying poles were mounted on the corners *“Make two gold rings below the molding – two on opposite sides - to hold the poles used to carry it. Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold.”*

*“Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the Ark ...”* - The preposition *“in front of”* does not specifically define the distance between the altar and the curtain. However, the reference to *“the Ark of the Testimony”* and *“the Atonement Cover that is over the Testimony - where I will meet with you”* strongly suggest that the Incense Altar was directly in front of the curtain as close to the Ark of the Covenant as possible while remaining outside the Holy of Holies. This has been the view of the great majority of interpreters throughout history.

*“The fact that it is followed by an apposition mentioning the Atonement Cover of the Ark suggests that it was front and center, directly before the curtain in the middle between the table and the lampstand. This would fit the symbolism of the incense as representing prayer before God since the fragrant smoke could be expected to reach into the Holy of Holies, there to offer its sweet aroma before God, whose presence is represented by the Ark in its entirety, and more narrowly, by the*

In contrast to this view, the sages of the Talmud concluded that the Incense Altar was located precisely in the center of the Holy Place, ten cubits away from the curtain. In rabbinic tradition this central location was intended to reflect the crucial importance of the altar within the overall design of the Tabernacle.

*“The placement of the Golden Altar in the Tabernacle and the Temple is very significant. The Incense Altar was centered in the Holy Place. It was centered*



*left to right and front to back. It was exactly at the center of the Holy Place. We have learned elsewhere that when something is centered it carries with it the connotation of 'connection.' The more centered the object, the greater the connection to life. That is why the heart is in the center of the area covered by a shirt. That is why the mid-brain is located in the center of the head, and why the uterus is in the center of the area from the belt to the bottom of the torso. This is why Jerusalem is in the center of Israel. Thus we learn that the Incense Altar was the most important feature of the Holy Place.” (Killian, p. 17)*

It is clear from the rabbi's explanation that the traditional Talmudic placement of the Incense Altar in the center of the Holy Place has more to do with symbolism than the actual description provided in Exodus.



*“The High Priest Before the Ark Amid the Clouds of Incense on Yom Kippur”*

The integral relationship between the Incense Altar and the Holy of Holies is repeatedly expressed in the Old Testament. In God's instructions for the erection of the Tabernacle, the Lord instructed Moses to **“Place the gold altar of incense in front of the Ark of the Testimony.”** (Exodus 40:5) The curtain which would intervene between them is not mentioned in order to stress their relation to one another. The directions for the ceremony of the Day of Atonement, in which, as noted above, the Incense Altar played a crucial role, this altar is identified as **“the altar before the Lord.”** (Leviticus 16:12) The phrase **“before the Lord”** is most certainly an allusion to the Ark which played the central role in the rituals of the Holy Day. The description of Solomon's Temple most emphatically affirmed the link between the Incense Altar and the Ark. The author of I Kings goes to great length to describe the pure gold which Solomon lavished upon the Ark and the Holy of Holies in which it was contained. Although the Incense Altar was not physically located within the

Holy of Holies, it was included in the description as *“the altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary.”*

*“He prepared the inner sanctuary within the Temple to set the Ark of the Lord there. The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty wide and twenty high. He overlaid the altar with pure gold, and he also overlaid the altar of cedar. Solomon covered the inside of the Temple with pure gold, and he extended gold chains across the front of the inner sanctuary, which was overlaid with gold. So he overlaid the whole interior with gold. He also overlaid with gold the altar that belonged to the inner sanctuary.”* (I Kings 6:19:22)

Commentators agree that each of these references are designed to express the unique role of the Incense Altar in relation to the presence of God and the sacred Ark.



*“The High Priest With Incense and Blood Before the Ark of the Covenant on the Day of Atonement”  
– 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving*

*“R.D. Patterson noted that even though the Ark was materially in the Holy Place ‘functionally and symbolically it was associated with the Most Holy Place’ (p. 67). Another scholar observed that while the altar was locally situated in the Holy Place ‘in its nature and idea’ it pertains to the Most Holy Place. (Kay, p. 69)”* (Jackson, p. 3)

The New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews makes the same point in its statement: *“Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold covered Ark of the Covenant.”* (Hebrews 9:3) Unfortunately, the English translation obscures the meaning of the Greek text and appears to mistakenly indicate that the Incense Altar was inside the Holy of Holies rather than that Holy Place. This would, of course, place Hebrews in contradiction to all of the Old Testament’s references. In a recent commentary on Hebrews, Anglican scholar Phillip Hughes suggests that the sense of the text should be clear to anyone familiar with the Old Testament

with the Old Testament background and the context of the Day of Atonement in which the author of Hebrews presents his observations. The overall point of the Hebrews text is the perfect fulfillment of everything foreshadowed here in Christ the great high priest. Hughes' masterful summary is worthy of being quoted at length:

*“It would seem sensible to conclude that our author, so far from being guilty of ignorance or eccentricity, was, as Spicq judges, following a liturgical tradition which recognized a special doctrinal association between the Altar of Incense and the Holy of Holies. As Keil and Delitzsch point out, ‘its place was to be in front of the curtain which concealed the Ark of the Covenant (xxvi,31), ‘before the Ark of the Testimony’ (xl,5), so that, although it really stood in the Holy Place between the candlestick on the south side and the table on the north (xxvi, 35; xl, 22 ,24), it was placed in the closest relation to the Ark of the Testimony, and for this reason, is not only connected with the Most Holy Place in I Kings vi, 22, but is reckoned in Hebrews ix, 4, as a part of the furniture of the Most Holy Place. ‘Similar considerations lead Lange to the decision that we should’ rather find a theological idea than an archaeological error’ in the passage before us. Certainly, the distinctive Christian understanding which our author is intent on imparting, and which evidently involves the association of the altar of incense with the holy of holies, the former symbolizing the prayers of God’s people, and the latter the heavenly sanctuary, is confirmed in Rev. 3:8 ff., where it is said that in the celestial reality incense is offered ‘with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne.’ The alignment of the brazen altar of sacrifice, the golden altar of incense, and the mercy seat, though each was located in a different division of the Tabernacle or its precincts, namely, in the courtyard, the holy place, and the holy of holies respectively, was undoubtedly an arrangement of the greatest significance. The straight line which connected these three with each other indicated clearly the line of propitiation and atonement appointed by God. Accordingly, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the holy of holies bearing with him the blood of the spotless victim vicariously slain on the altar of sacrifice and also the incense from the altar of incense which, when sprinkled on the live coals (taken from the altar of sacrifice!) generated a sweet smelling cloud, symbolical, as we have mentioned of the prayers of the people as the atoning blood was applied to the mercy seat. Indeed, the closeness of the association was further demonstrated that the fact of the sin offering was also applied by the high priest to the altar of sacrifice and the altar of incense (Lev xvi: 17 ff; Ex xxx, 10). Bearing in mind that the principal focus of our author’s exposition is the Day of Atonement and the fulfillment of all its ceremonial portended in the perfect high priestly work of Christ, the appropriateness of his association of the altar of incense with the holy of holies becomes evident.” (Hughes, pp. 313 - 314)*

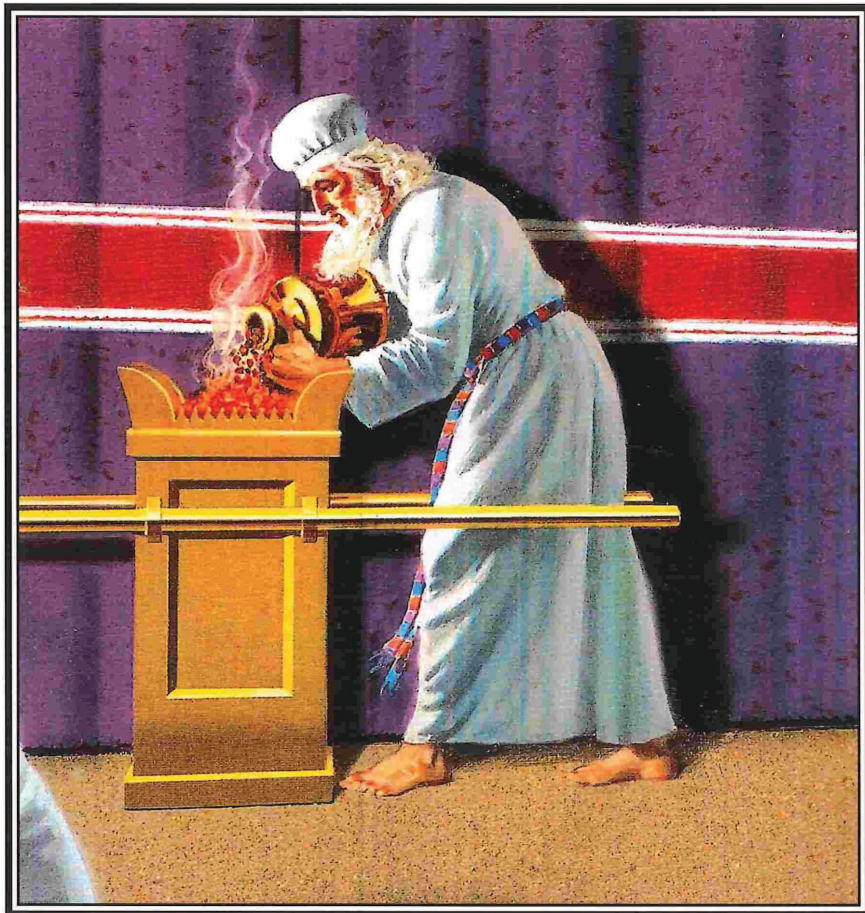
## **Verses 7 - 10**

***Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar when he tends the lamps. He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the Lord for the generations to come. Do not offer on this altar any other incense or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour a drink offering on it. Once a year, Aaron shall make atonement on its horns. This annual atonement must be made with the blood of the atoning sin offering for the generations to come. It is most holy to the Lord.***

***“Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar when he tends the lamps.”*** - The text goes on to define the proper use of the Incense Altar. Its use is tied to the same morning/evening schedule which governed the other fundamental rituals of Tabernacle worship - the lighting and trimming of the menorah lamps, and the morning/ evening sacrifices upon the Altar of Burnt Offerings. Each of these rituals was designed to signify perpetual, permanently ongoing activity – ***“so incense will burn regularly before the Lord for generations to come.”*** In this instance that activity was the ceaseless prayer of Israel before the Lord. While the text in this instance refers to Aaron alone, it is clear that the daily incense offerings were presented by other priests, not merely the high priest. Rabbinic tradition described the specific procedure for the incense offering in this way:

*“Any priest (kohen) was eligible to bring the daily incense offering, not specifically the High Priest. The priest would bring half of that day’s incense (a Manah (341 grams) daily) in the morning, between the preparation of the Menorah and the conclusion of the Korban Tamid (the daily burnt offering), and half in the afternoon between the kindling of the five lamps of the Menorah and that of the remaining two. This is how the Ramban (Maimonides) describes the ritual: ‘The priest who won the right to clear the Incense Altar would enter the Sanctuary with a holy vessel made of gold that held two and a half measures. Placing it on the ground in front of the Altar of Incense, he would proceed to scoop the ashes and the spent coals that remained on the Altar of Incense with his hands and empty them into the vessel. Whatever was left he would sweep into it.’ The priest who won the right to bring the incense would then take a covered vessel already heaped with incense. This he would then place inside another vessel, a large pan, which he had covered with a cloth. He was now joined by a second priest who had won the right to perform the ritual of the pan, and who had taken burning coals from the second arrangement of firewood upon the Altar of Burnt Offering, with a silver shovel. He now descended and poured the coals into a golden shovel. If no more than a kav of coal spilt, they would sweep it into the stream that ran across the courtyard - whereas on the Sabbath, since it could not be handled, they would simply cover it with a vessel. If more than a kav of ashes spilt, they would shovel it back onto the silver shovel and from there onto the golden one. The two priests then entered the Holy Place together. Meanwhile, the priest*

who had cleared the Incense Altar, had taken the golden vessel with the spent ashes, prostrated himself and left the Sanctuary. The priest with the golden pan would then empty its contents onto the Incense Altar and spread them across the top, using the base of the pan. Then he too would prostrate himself and leave. The remaining priest would then remove the golden vessel from the larger golden vessel and hand it to another priest who would then pour its contents, along with any that had spilt into the larger vessel in the priest's two hands. He would then prostrate himself and leave the Holy Place. Before the remaining priest began emptying the incense from his hands onto the Incense Altar, those present would warn him not to begin pouring it at the point closest to him, to avoid him getting burned as his hands moved over the burning incense toward the far side of the Incense Altar. The priest in charge would announce, 'Proceed to sacrifice the incense.' (Adding the title Lord High Priest if it was the High Priest who was performing the ritual that day). The priest would pour the incense from his hands across the surface of the altar, gently, like one sifts flour, beginning at the far end as we explained. The moment the priest gave the order to proceed, everyone had to leave the Holy Place and the innermost area of the courtyard known as between the entrance and the Incense Altar." (Killian pp. 16 - 17)



*Burning Incense Within the Holy Place*



*“Nadab and Abihu, the Sons of Aaron Consumed by the Fire of the Lord”*

*“Do not offer on this altar any other incense ...”* - The prohibitions of Verse 9 strictly limit the offerings to be made upon the Incense Altar to those specified by God Himself. The incense to be burned had to be precisely compounded according to the formula which would subsequently be provided. The Hebrew phrase translated here as *“any other incense”* literally refers to any alien or foreign incense. Furthermore, although this was an *“altar”* no other form of sacrifice was ever to be performed upon it – *“or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour a drink offering on it.”* The severity with which these rules were to be enforced reflected the unique sanctity of the Incense Altar as a vessel closely related to the Ark and the divine presence within the Holy of Holies. Transgression here was an intolerable affront to the majesty of the Lord. This was tragically illustrated by the death of Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu who deviated from the prescribed ritual when they offered *“unauthorized fire before the Lord.”*

*“Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to His command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.”* (Leviticus 10:1 - 2)

Two other episodes in the Old Testament further demonstrate the severe penalties which come upon those who violated the sanctity of the Incense Altar. The first was the rebellion of Korah the Levite. Korah and his followers had challenged the preeminence of Aaron and his clan within the priesthood. Each faction was called to offer incense before the Lord. The followers of Korah were consumed with divine fire (cf. Numbers 16). The second episode involved the presumption of King Uzziah, who took it upon himself as the anointed king to make the incense offering:

*“But after Uzziah become powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the Altar of Incense. Azariah the priest, with eighty other courageous priests of the Lord foiled him in. They confronted him and*

*said, 'It is not right for you, Uzziah to burn incense before the Lord. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and you will not be honored by the Lord God.' Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand, ready to burn incense became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the Lord's altar in the Lord's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. And when Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed, he himself was eager to leave because the Lord had afflicted him. King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died."* (2 Chronicles 26: 16 - 21)



*“King Uzziah Stricken With Leprosy Before the Incense Altar Within the Sanctuary”*

*“Once a year, Aaron shall make atonement on its horns ...”* - The precious sanctity of the Incense Altar is reinforced by its annual re - consecration on the Day of Atonement. The same ceremony applied to the bronze Altar of Burnt Offering (cf. Exodus 29:36 - 37). This was the only time when anything other than the sacred incense was used upon the golden altar. This ceremony is detailed in Leviticus 16 which deals with the Day of Atonement. The summary statement at the conclusion of the paragraph serves to explain the status of the Incense Altar as the basis for all of these provisions – *“It is most holy to the Lord.”* The same affirmation was previously asserted in reference to the Altar of Burnt Offerings, thereby setting apart both sites where atonement offering were presented to the Lord.

## **Verses 11 - 16**

***Then the Lord said to Moses, “When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half - shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the Lord. All who cross over, those twenty years or more, are to give an offering to the Lord. The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the Lord to atone for your lives. Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the Tent of Meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord making atonement for their lives.***

***“Then the Lord said to Moses, “When you take a census ...”*** - Moses is instructed to take a census of the people in order to levy a tax to help underwrite the cost of the Tabernacle. The practice of census taking in the theocratic nation of Israel was a concept fraught with peril and uncertainty because of its implications for God’s direct sovereignty over His chosen people. The reality of the dangers involved can be seen God’s response to a census ordered by King David. As the King contemplated military campaigns to extend the boundaries of his kingdom, rather than consult the Lord and submit to His direction, entrusting the outcome to Him, David ordered a census to determine the number of fighting men available to him. I Chronicles 21:1 notes that this prideful action occurred at the instigation of Satan: ***“Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.”*** Joab, the commander of the royal armies, warned the king not to proceed with this venture, but David persisted. The census was taken. It revealed that there were 1,300,000 warriors available throughout the realm. In the aftermath of the count, David recognized his error and repented: ***“David was conscience stricken after he counted the fighting men and he said to the Lord, ‘I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of Your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.’”*** (2 Samuel 24: 10) The Lord’s punishment was a plague in which 70,000 people perished. Douglas Stuart explained the issues at stake:

*“In the ancient world, a census was taken for one of only two purposes, to prepare for war or to impose some sort of taxation...Because the Israelites had no right to go to war except for the taking and holding of the Promised Land by holy war, as called explicitly by Yahweh through a prophet and because they had no right to impose taxes beyond the contribution system revealed in the law by God Himself, the taking of a census would constitute, in most cases, an act of direct covenant disobedience.”* (Stuart, p. 636)

In this instance, however, it is God Himself who instituted the census. Nonetheless, it was to be implemented carefully in accordance with the divine command. Nor was this to be an annual or ongoing event. Since God Himself ruled this nation, if a census was to be taken, it would have to be at His initiative and in accordance with His command.





*“The opening words of this set of laws assume there will be occasions when the Israelites are properly to take a census, but at the same time, sternly inform them that they must never get used to the idea as if it could be done at whim, or in any way as a matter of their own discretion.” (Stuart, p. 636)*

The specific purpose for this census was the levy of a tax to involve every Israelite in the contribution made to fund the construction of the Tabernacle – **“and use it for the service of the Tent of Meeting.”** (Vs.16) It was to be taken when Moses came down from Mount Sinai and returned to Israel. In fact, given subsequent events, it would have been taken after God devastated the people with a plague because of their disobedience with the Golden Calf and served the additional purpose of determining how many had survived God’s plague upon their disobedience. Two other numberings of the people would occur in the Torah, one to enable the organization of the camp and the march for the wilderness wandering (Numbers 1) and another at the end of the wilderness wandering to prepare the people for the conquest of the Promised Land. (Numbers 26)

Later, in the days of the second temple, these verses were used as the precedent to establish a permanent on - going Temple Tax levied the diaspora of Israel across the ancient world. (Cf. Nehemiah 10:32 - 33) The half - shekel specified by Moses was collected in every synagogue and sent home to Jerusalem where it became the major source of income for the



*The Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus*

powerful temple establishment. Much of the money was diverted to the corrupt families which dominated the religious/political faction of the Sadducees. After the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the emperor Vespasian continued the annual temple tax upon the members of every synagogue in the empire as a bitter reminder of the end of the holy temple and the Jews' dream of independence. The tax was called the "*Fiscus Judaicus*" ("*the Jew Tax*"). Those who had destroyed the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem decreed that the proceeds from the Jew Tax would go to fund its Roman counterpart, the massive Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, the chief God of the Roman pantheon, upon the Capitoline Hill overlooking the Forum in the heart of Rome. This annual humiliation continued for nearly 300 years as a painful reminder of the price for defying the might of imperial Rome.

***“When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted.”*** - The Hebrew term ***“take a census”*** literally means ***“to raise the head.”*** The same concept is reflected in the English idiom ***“to take a head count.”*** The significance of being counted in the census is described as to ***“pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted.”*** The use of the ***“ransom”*** language here continues the theme of ***“atonement”*** which has been prevalent throughout the chapter. The payment of such a ***“ransom”*** is identical to what is characteristically described in the concept of ***“redemption,”*** that is, a price paid to deliver someone whose life is forfeit or to liberate a slave from slavery. That is the sense in which ***“redeem”*** is used in Exodus 21:30 in reference to the redemption price paid for a man whose carelessness has caused someone to be gored by his ox:

***“If, however, the bull has had a habit of goring and the owner has been warned, but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or a woman, the bull must be stone, and the owner must also be put to death. However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded.”*** (Exodus 21:29 - 30; cf. 13:15; 34:20)

The overlapping significance of these three concepts - atone, redeem, and ransom can also be observed in the New Testament’s usage of these terms in reference to the work of Christ:

*“The conceptual interconnection of ransoming and redeeming is confirmed by the New Testament use of these terms for the same act of Christ on our behalf: that He ransomed us from death or redeemed us from death is one and the same assertion...It becomes evident that the two ideas are comparable metaphors for describing the same phenomenon. Although the concept of atonement is yet another concept, it overlaps with these two to describe the same phenomenon as well. This phenomenon can also be described with such terms as ‘atonement,’ ‘propitiation,’ and ‘reconciliation.’ Even though each of these terms has a distinctive nuance, each is also appropriate to denote the achievement of Christ’s sacrifice in winning back sinners from the penalty of death.”* (Stuart, pp. 637 - 638)

In this context, being counted in the census and paying the Tabernacle tax is an affirmation of one’s identity as part of the chosen people and an assertion of the gracious blessing which they have been given to participate in *“the abundant life that He had for them within His covenant protection.”* In that sense, the counting/tax truly does constitute ***“a ransom for his life.”***

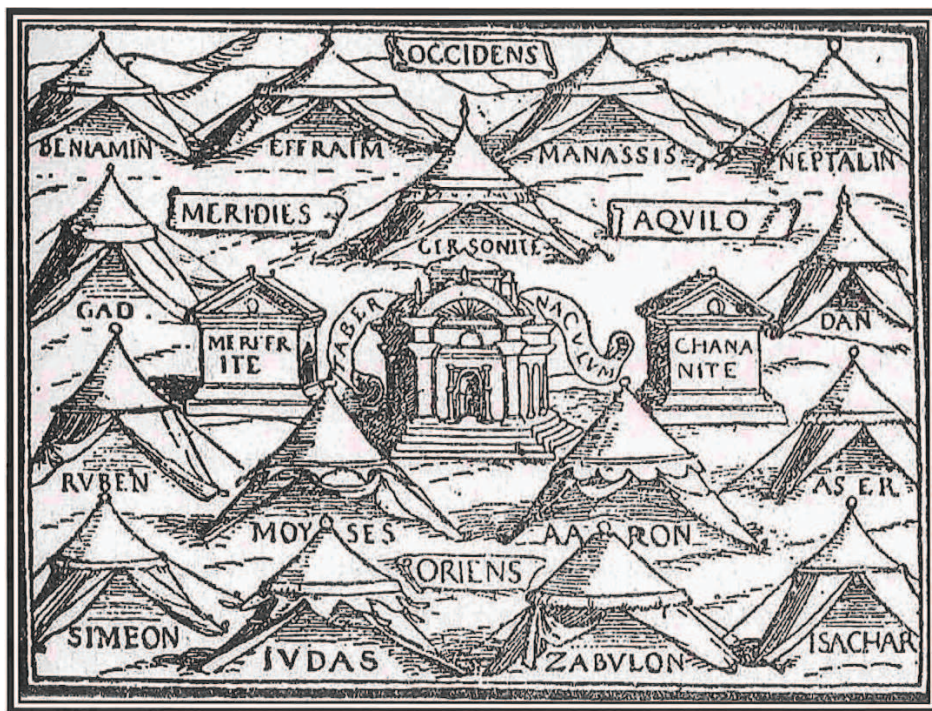


***“The Egyptians Mourning the Death of the Firstborn”***

***“Then no plague will come on them when you number them.”*** - The use of the ***“plague”*** terminology here recalls the tenth plague of Egypt when the Israelite households whose doorways had been marked with the blood of the Passover Lamb were spared by the Angel of Death who struck down all the firstborn of Egypt. The same ***“ransom”*** terminology had been used in reference to that deliverance: ***“When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. That is why I sacrifice to the Lord the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.”*** (Exodus 13:15) The reference to ***“plague”*** also anticipates the deadly plague with which God punished all those who had denied Him by their worship of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32:35).

***“Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half-shekel ...”*** – The crossing over in this phrase most probably refers to the counting process as one moves from the category of those who have not been counted over to those who have been counted. Others suggest a more profound symbolic significance here –

*“To pass over, however, may imply crossing a boundary. But what boundary is crossed here? Rabbi Ibn Ezra thinks that what is passed is twenty years. Or, as Israel pays the ransom silver, one could imagine them crossing from death to life, or passing into Yahweh’s possession.”* (Propp, II, p. 422)



***“The Encampment of Israel Around the Tabernacle” – 17<sup>th</sup> Century***

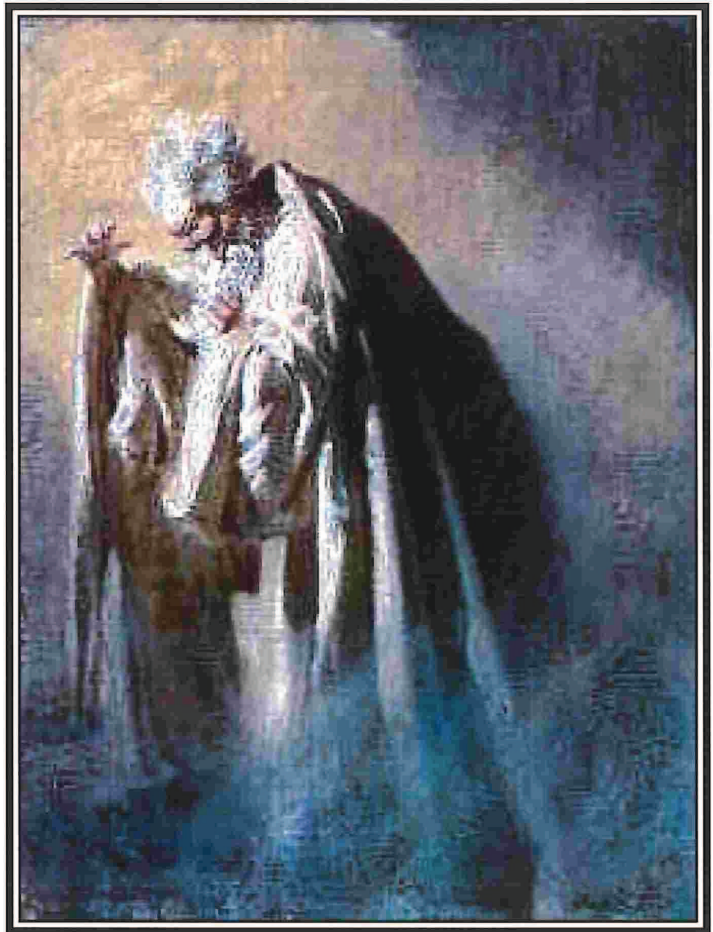
The payment is the atonement price which became the substitute for the life of the individual by whom the payment was made. In verse 16, the half shekel is identified as ***“the atonement money”*** (literally – ***“the holiness money”***). The nature of the payment as atonement further explains why the payment was to be the same for every Israelite no

matter what their stature or economic status may have been. In the eyes of God every man, that is, every sinner, is equal. – ***“The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make an offering to the Lord to atone for your lives.”*** *“The payment involved an acknowledgment from all in Israel that they belonged to the Lord, and the He was their rightful ruler. All were received on equal terms, no matter what their worldly wealth and status.”* (Mackay, p. 507)

Nahum Sama notes that the consistent use of the concept of atonement is the thread which binds the various segments of Chapter 30 together. *“This payment is considered to be a ransom for the life of the individual; it serves to avert a plague. In other words, it has an expiatory function, which connects this topic with the one immediately preceding it. Both feature a threefold emphasis of the Hebrew stem ‘kippur’ variously translated ‘purification, ransom, expiation.’”* (Sama, p. 195)

Obviously, the rabbis were troubled by the concept that atonement could possibly have been purchased with a silver coin. Reflecting this discomfort, the Talmud teaches that as God specified the amount to be given, He held before Moses a silver half-shekel coin aflame with burning fire. The rabbis argued that the presence of the fire burning around the coin was designed to emphasize the unique role of this particular coin and to enable Moses to understand how the base worldly element of silver could be used to provide atonement:

*“God showed Moses a fiery coin. As has been seen previously, God instructed the people to donate materials to the Tabernacle to atone for their involvement in the incident of the Golden Calf. It is in this context that the half-shekel poll tax is described in this verse as ‘atonement money...to atone for your souls.’ Moses was perplexed by the notion that the soul can be redeemed from such a severe sin by a mere piece of silver...So Moses was shown a coin of fire – not by an angel but by God Himself, for God is not bound by the rules of any order, natural or otherwise. God demonstrated that in the case of the half-shekel, opposites can become one; silver the lowest element (from the depths of the earth), becomes fire, the highest element (from the heavenly throne of*

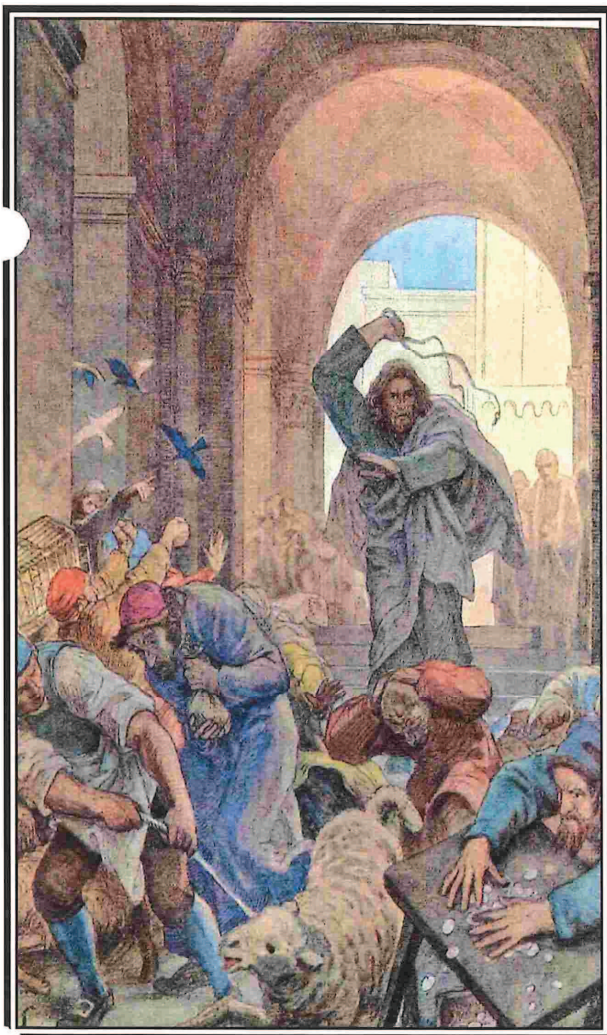


***“Moses Before the Lord Upon Sinai” by Francis Owen Salisbury***

God)...God's point was that even the physical half-shekel can be transformed into fire and thereby have the power to redeem a soul...A coin given without feeling is indeed cold and unremarkable. But a coin given with the warmth and enthusiasm of the soul's essence is fire - alive spiritually - and it can atone for the gravest sin. This was the coin of fire shown to Moses." (Chumash, pp. 240 - 241)

Intriguing speculation, but only speculation nonetheless.

The amount of the was not exorbitant. The **"half-shekel"** equals about a fifth of an ounce of silver. *"A half shekel (about a fifth of an ounce of silver) was not a fortune but was sufficiently demanding so that the ransom/redemption was costly enough that it could not be regarded by anyone as trivial."* (Stuart, p. 638) **"Twenty gerahs"** is the weight equivalent of the half shekel since at this early point in Israelite history most of the people would not have had coins. Commentators indicate that the contemporary value of this tax would have been several hundred dollars.



*"Jesus Driving the Dishonest Money Changers From the Temple" by Rudolf Scherfer*

The reference to **"the sanctuary shekel"** (literally – *"the holiness shekel"*) would appear to suggest that the scales which established the official weights and standards of the nation were maintained in the Tabernacle to insure their integrity and consistency. The problem of injustice caused by inconsistent measures is frequently addressed throughout the Old Testament for **"The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight."** (Proverbs 11:1):

**"Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. Use honest scales and honest weights to establish an ephah, and an honest hin. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt."** (Leviticus 19:35 - 36)

**"Do not have two differing weights in your bag, one heavy, one light. Do not have two differing measures in your house, one large and one small. You must have accurate and honest weights and measures so that you may live long in the**

***land the Lord your God is giving you. For the Lord your God detests anyone who does these things, anyone who deals dishonestly.***” (Deuteronomy 25:13 - 16; cf. Ezekiel 25:10 - 12 ; Hosea 12:8; Amos 8:5; Micah 6:11; Proverbs 11:1; 20:23; Job 31:6)

The rage of Christ in repeatedly driving the dishonest dealers and corrupt money changers from the temple is illustrative of God’s abhorrence of such devious practice, particularly in terms of the business of God's holy temple.

***“Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the Tent of Meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord, making atonement for their lives.”*** -The proceeds from this tax were to be used ***“for the service of the Tent of Meeting.”*** Exodus 38 reports the results of the census and indicates that the silver obtained from the census was used to fashion the bases and fixtures of the bases for the posts of the Tabernacle:

***“The silver obtained from the census of the community was 100 talents, and 1,775 shekels according to the sanctuary shekel - one beka per person, that is, a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, from everyone who crossed over to those counted, twenty years or more, a total of 603,550 men. The one hundred talents of silver were used to cast the bases for the sanctuary and for the curtain - 100 bases from the 100 talents, one talent for each base. They used the 1,775 shekels to make the hooks for the posts, to overlay the tops for the posts, and to make their bands.”*** (Exodus 38:25 - 28)

The divinely commanded numbering and the payment which accompanied it to aid in the construction of the Tabernacle were to serve as ***“a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord, making atonement for their lives.”*** The linkage of Israel’s covenant relationship with the Lord with this series of activities, all of which involved the Tabernacle is most fitting. The Tabernacle itself was the concrete manifestation of God’s presence in the midst of the people, the place where He had promised to meet with them, through the priest which He had ordained, and the sacrifices and services which He had defined. Every detail of this arrangement was messianic, that is, looking forward to, fulfilled and empowered by the Savior whom God had promised to perfectly accomplish all that which had been foreshadowed in these events.

***“The money given thus functioned as ‘a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord,’ a visible token or indicator of the fact that Yahweh knew the volunteers belonged to Him and thus were holy. They made atonement for their lives and knew that Yahweh regarded them as His own. Since such a practice had its ultimate analogy in the death of Christ as the payment for the atonement for sins, one should not forget that this divine substitutionary death causes all who believe in it faith to be remembered by God as His own.”*** (Stuart, p. 639)



*“Aaron and His Sons Washing at the Bronze Laver”*

### ***Verses 17 - 21***

***Then the Lord said to Moses; “Make a bronze basin with its bronze stand for washing. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it. Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water from it. Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash their hands and feet with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to minister by presenting an offering by fire, they shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come.”***

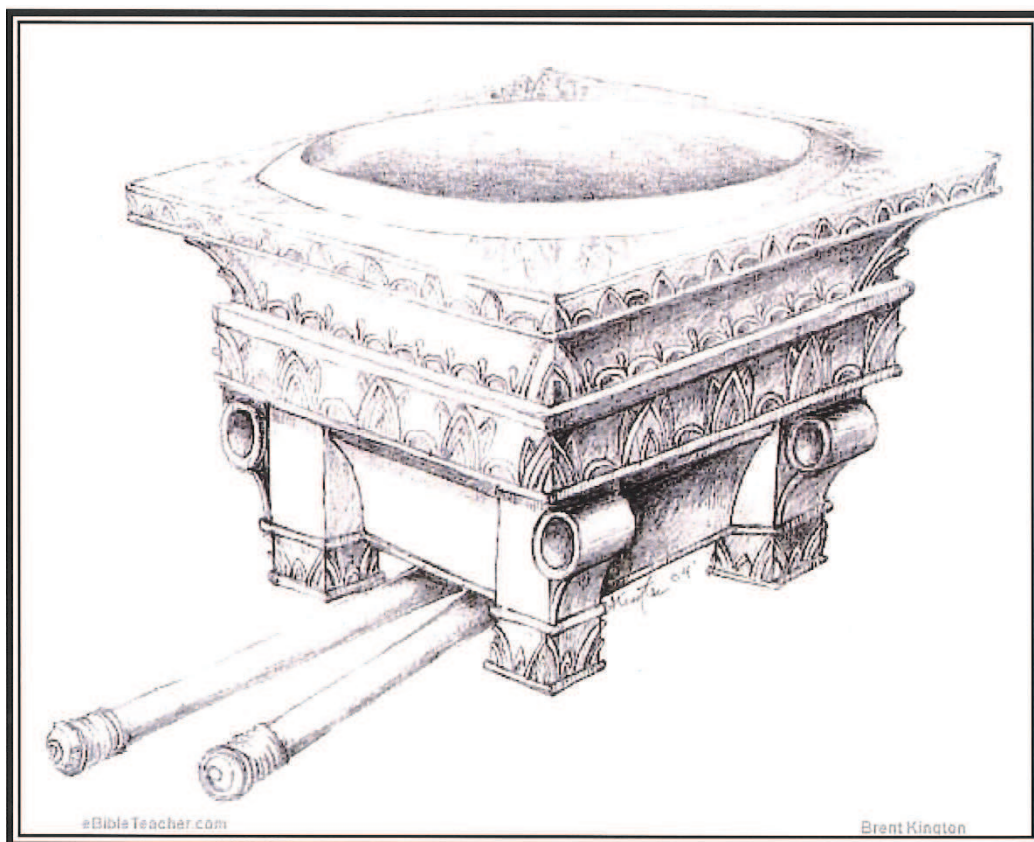
***“Then the Lord said to Moses; ‘Make a bronze basin...’”*** - The instructions for the construction of the bronze basin and its use were not included in the previous design statements because this instrument was not a part of the rituals themselves, nor of the ordination ceremonies of the priesthood. At the same time, it would not be made of either the materials provided by the public donations or the Tabernacle tax. Instead, the basin would be made from the bronze mirrors donated by the women who served at the entrance to the Tabernacle. This information would be provided in Exodus 38:8 – ***“They made the bronze basin and its bronze stand from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.”***

***“Place it between the Tent of Meeting and Altar and put water in it.”*** - The laver is to be positioned between the Altar of Burnt Offerings and the Entrance to the Tabernacle so that it may effectively serve its purpose as the water receptacle in which the priests may cleanse the hands and feet from the blood, soot and dust with which they have been soiled during



the sacrifices before entering the sacred space of the Holy Place. While the text does not specify the size of the basin, Rabbinic tradition indicated that it had to be large enough to accommodate four priests washing their hands and feet at the same time. Since the instructions indicate that the washing basin was to be placed upon a stand, the rabbis further concluded that it included a number of spigots which enabled the clean water to be conveniently drawn from it. There is no indication of such spigots or their design anywhere in Scripture. Rabbi Avraham Bidermann presented the Talmud's perspective in a recent book *The Mishkan - The Tabernacle and Its Sacred Vessels*. The rabbi's words demonstrate how tradition and speculation intertwine in Orthodox Judaism:

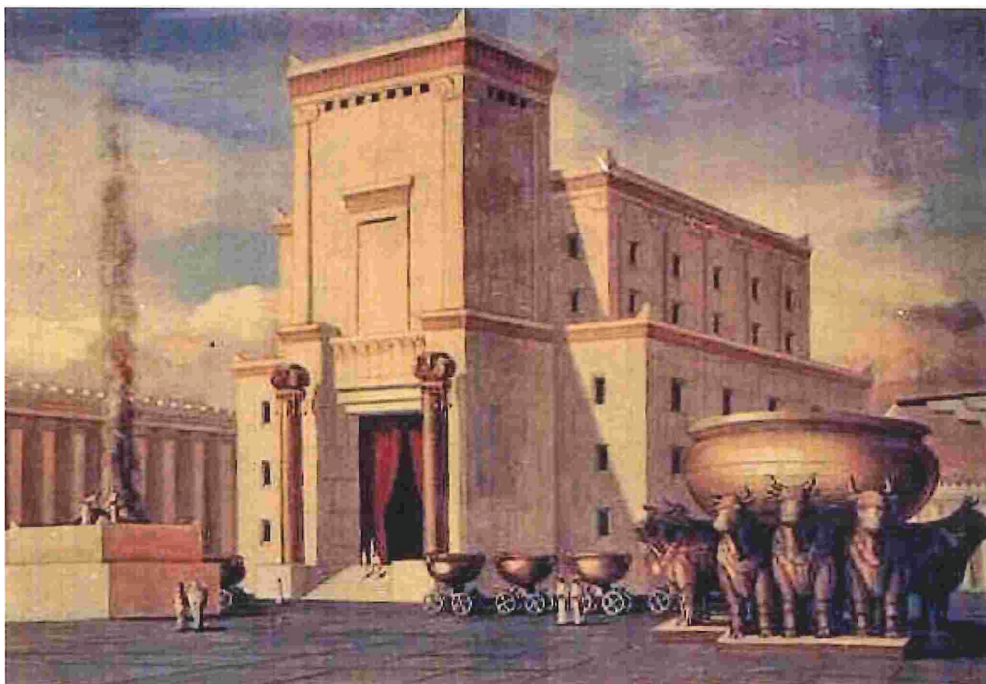
*“The laver was a large vessel like a pot from which priests could wash their hands and feet before beginning their service in the Tabernacle. The laver rested on a base that was similar to an overturned utensil. Both the laver and the base were made from the copper mirrors that the Jewish women had used in Egypt, and which they subsequently contributed for the Tabernacle (Exodus 38:8). The water flowed from the laver through two spigots placed near its bottom which allowed two priests to wash simultaneously. There is an opinion that one of the spigots was placed high on the laver, and that it was used in the morning when the laver was full of water. The other was placed near the bottom of the laver, and it was used in the evening when the water was low.*”



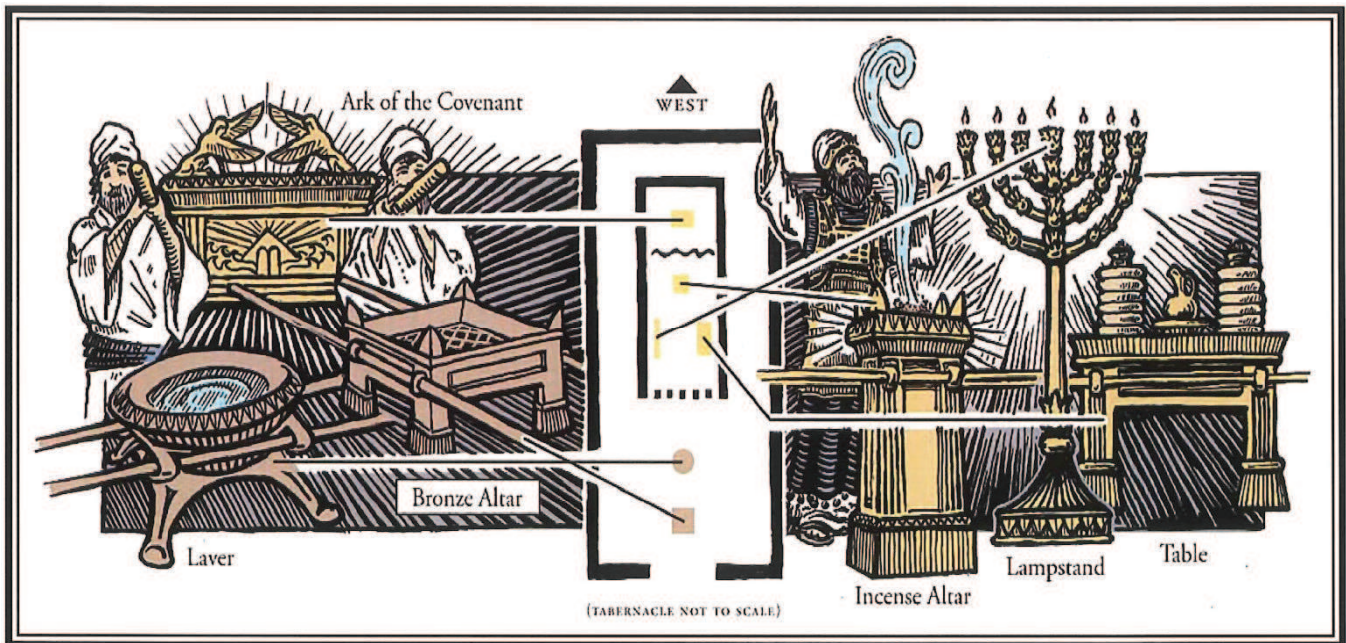
*Archaeologists' Reconstruction of the Tabernacle Laver Based Upon Ancient Near Eastern Parallels*

*We are not certain how the flow of water was controlled or stopped. 'When the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses to build the Mishkan, everyone rushed to bring what they could. The women said, 'What contribution can we offer to the building of the Mishkan?' They took their mirrors and brought them to Moses. When Moses saw the mirrors, he was angered. 'What need is there for these mirrors?' he said. So the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him; 'You are disdainning these women and these mirrors? These are the ones who produced these legions of Jews while in Egypt! Take these mirrors and make the copper laver - from which the Kohanim will sanctify themselves - and its base.' He said.'" (Tanchuma, Pechudel 9) Although we are not taught a size for the laver, we are told (Exodus 40:31), 'And Moses and Aaron and his sons will wash from it their hands and their feet.' This teaches us that it must hold at least enough water for four Kohanim - Moses, Aaron, and his two surviving sons - to wash their hands and feet...When the Kohanim entered the Mishkan area to perform their service they would wash their hands and feet from the laver. This is called 'sanctifying the hands and feet.' The Kohen would place his right hand on his right foot and his left hand on his left foot, and he would place them under the water while bowing. The Kohen may not sit while performing this sanctification, since it is considered a formal service in the Mishkan. The kohanim were required to sanctify their hands and feet before doing any service - whether in the Mishkan itself or related to the altar located in the courtyard.'" (Bidermann, p. 235ff.)*

Whatever the specific details of the basin's size, design and use may have been, it is clear that it must have been a relatively small vessel holding no more than a few gallons of water.



*"The Temple of Solomon With the Brazen Sea in the Foreground"*



Given the portability required of the Tabernacle and its vessels, this would have been an absolute necessity. This would also have been in sharp contrast to the massive *“bronze sea”* which King Solomon installed in his temple each of which held hundreds of gallons of water and was mounted upon the backs of twelve bronze bulls combined with twelve wheeled lavers each of which contained 150 gallons of water.

The cleansing of the priests in the clear water of the bronze basin outside the sanctuary did not merely serve the functional purpose of maintaining the cleanliness of the Tabernacle. Its basic purpose was to convey the spiritual truth of the necessity for purification among those who would stand before the Lord in His sanctuary. The Psalmist made this point with direct reference to this ceremonial ritual when he declared: *“Who shall attend to the Hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in His Holy Place? He who hath clean hands and a pure heart.”* (Psalm 24:3 - 4) The New Testament declared that this work of cleansing had been perfectly accomplished in Christ: *“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.”* (Hebrews 10:22 - 24)

*“They shall wash their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come.”* As in previous instances, the text stresses the significance of the ritual by the imposition of the death penalty for failure and the assertion of the permanence of the practice as a core component of the priesthood *“for the generations to come.”* The ritual of washing was to remain as an ongoing reminder of the sinner’s need for cleansing to stand before the Lord. The rabbis aptly point out the appropriateness of the fact that the laver had been fashioned from bronze mirrors, since each time he washed the priest saw his own sinful nature reflected. *“The*

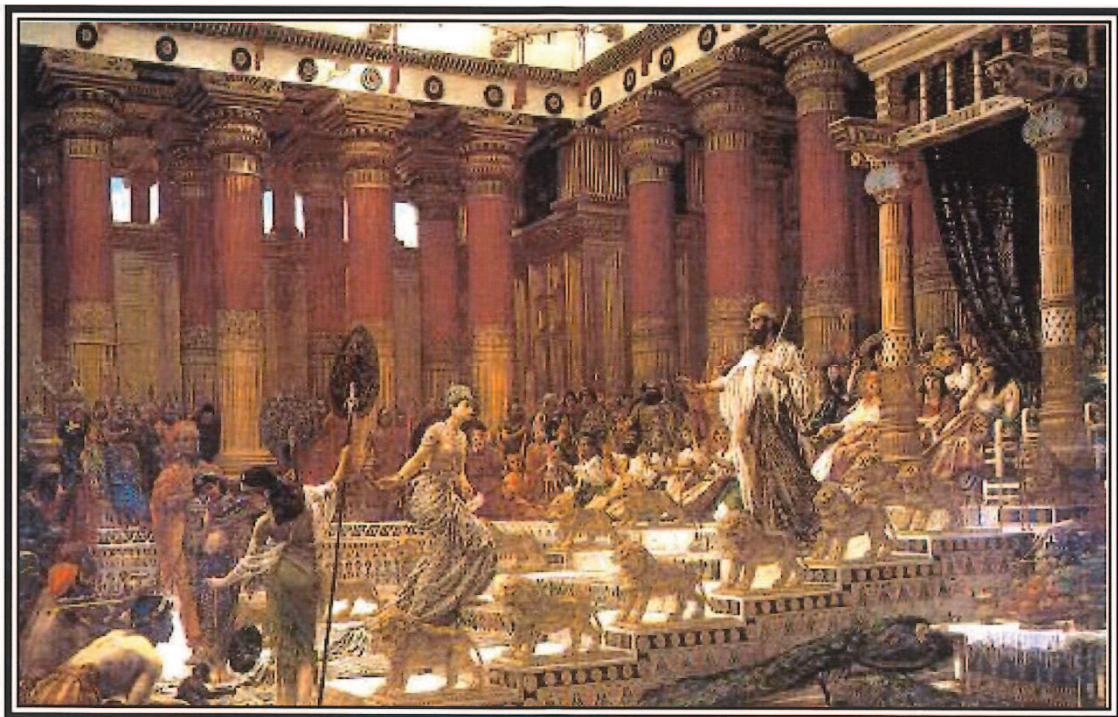
washing is an indispensable requirement; its neglect renders the priest's service invalid." (Sama, p. 197)

### **Verses 22 - 33**

***Then the Lord said to Moses; "Take the following fine spices: 500 shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much (that is, 250 shekels) of fragrant cinnamon, 250 shekels of fragrant cane, 500 shekels of cassia - all according to the sanctuary shekel, and a hin of olive oil. Make these into a sacred anointing oil. Then use it to anoint the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Testimony, the table and all its articles, the lampstand and its accessories, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the basin with its stand. You shall consecrate them so that they will be most holy, and whatever touches them will be holy.***

***"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Take the following fine spices..."*** - This paragraph contains the instructions for the compounding of the anointing oil to be used in the consecration of the High Priest, the priesthood, and the furnishings of the Tabernacle. The precious materials to be used in this process were to be supplied by special donations from the tribal elders aside from the general gifts given by the people. One must recognize the value of these materials in the ancient world in order to fully appreciate the significance of this series of instructions:

*"Spices and perfumes were rare, highly prized commodities in the ancient world. As I Kings 10:2, 10 relate, that the Queen of Sheba arrived in Jerusalem bearing gifts of spices, gold and precious stones for King Solomon.*



***"The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba"***



*“Joseph Sold Into Slavery By His Brothers” by Flavitski*

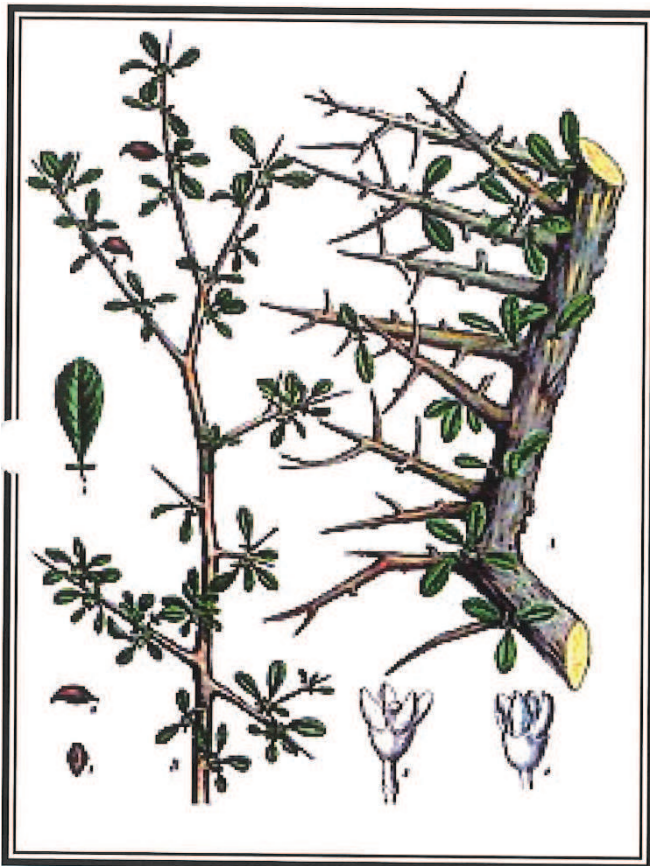
*These products were costly due to the huge amount of raw materials needed to manufacture the desired quantity, and to the great distances they had to be transported by land caravan or by sea from distant locations in Arabia, Somaliland (in central Africa), India, and even China. It will be remembered that the caravan of Ishmaelites to whom Joseph was sold by his brothers was on its way to Egypt from Gilead with a load of precious spices (‘As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices, balm, and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.’ Gen. 37:25). Finally, the highly specialized art of perfumery demanded a high level of skill and experience.” (Sarna, p. 197)*

The acknowledgment of rare spices as precious treasures is further indicated by the inclusion of frankincense and myrrh among the gifts which the Magi presented to the Christ child as the new-born King of the Jews: **“Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and myrrh.”** (Matthew 2:11)

The particular value of the ingredients for the anointing oil is indicated by their designation in the Lord’s instructions as **“fine spices”** (literally in the Hebrew – *“the head of fragrances”*). This terminology suggests that they were the foremost or very best of their kind. The Hebrew noun for **“spices”** is *“besamim”* which originally identified the resin of the balsam tree which was prized for its pleasing aroma. The word came to be used more

broadly in reference to pungent spices of any kind. Four individual spices are specified in decreasing order of value. The “*shekel*” in this context is not a reference to the more familiar coins the designation of which had been derived from their weight but rather to the original standard unit of dry measure. It would appear that the weight of a shekel varied significantly over time. “*The Interpreters’ Dictionary of The Bible*” offers this definition:

*“Shekel is derived from a root which means ‘to weigh.’ It was a weight and later a coin. In early Babylonian times the shekel weight varied from .3 ounce to .62 ounce. In Israelite times, the shekel seems to have averaged about .403 ounce. At the time of the first Jewish Revolt (A.D. 66 - 70) there was a silver coin averaging a little less than half an ounce.” (TIDB, 4, p. 317)*



Based upon these estimates, the total of 1,500 shekels of spices to be used for the anointing oil would have equaled nearly 38 pounds.

“*Myrrh*” is the aromatic resin produced by a number of small thorny trees which grow in the rocky sandy ground characteristic of the arid deserts of the Middle East. Yemen, Somalia, Arabia and eastern Ethiopia are the countries historically associated with the production of myrrh. The harvesting of myrrh is a laborious process in which the bark of the trees is repeatedly pierced to allow the thick sap to ooze through and harden into tiny white globes which resemble pearls. The pearls were then removed from the thorn covered trees with meticulous care and eventually crushed into powder. Scripture also refers to myrrh as the “*balm of Gilead*” with reference to its medicinal use as a

healing salve or soothing vapor. (Cf. Jeremiah 8; 22; 46:11; 51:8) It is linked to the northern town of Gilead because of its location along one of the major routes of the spice trade between Asia and Egypt. Throughout much of ancient history myrrh, sold by weight, exceeded the value of gold.

“*Fragrant cinnamon*” is a spice obtained from the inner bark of a group of trees belonging to the genus “*cinnamomum*” native to southeast Asia, particularly the island of Ceylon and eastern India. Cinnamon has been cultivated from time immemorial in Sri Lanka. Cinnamon trees are now grown commercially in the Indian province of Kerala, Bangladesh, Sumatra, the West Indies, Brazil, Madagascar, Viet Nam, Zanzibar, and Egypt. Sri Lanka

(Ceylon) remains the source of the finest and most expensive Cinnamon. The spice has been widely used throughout the Mediterranean basin and subsequently Europe since remote antiquity. Ancient documents indicate that cinnamon was being imported to Egypt as early as 2000 B.C. The Hebrew Bible makes frequent references to the use of cinnamon in both religious and secular contexts:

*“The Hebrew Bible makes specific reference to cinnamon many times, first when Moses is commanded to use both ‘sweet cinnamon’ and ‘cassia’ in the holy anointing oil (Exodus 30:22 - 25); in Proverbs where the lover’s bed is perfumed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon, (Proverbs 7:17) and in the Song of Solomon, a song describing his beloved, cinnamon scents her garments ‘like the smell of Lebanon.’ (Song Of Solomon 4:11 - 14) Cinnamon was a component of the ‘Ketoret’ which was used when referring to the consecrated incense described in the Hebrew Bible and Talmud. It was offered on the specialized incense altar from the time of the Tabernacle throughout the era of the first and second temples. The Ketoret was an important component of the Temple service in Jerusalem. It was so highly prized among ancient nations that it was regarded as a gift fit for monarchs and even for a god. A fine inscription describes the gift of cinnamon to a Temple of Apollo at Miletus...It was too expensive to be commonly used on funeral pyres in Rome, but the emperor Nero is said to have burned a year’s worth of the cities supply at the funeral of his wife, Poppaea Sabina in A.D. 65.” (Wikappedia – “Cinnamon”)*



*“Medieval Image of An Arab Cinnamon Bird Hunter”*



*“Nero Using The Burning Christian Martyrs to Light His Banquet”*

Contemporary Roman historians viewed the mind-boggling extravagance as clear evidence of Nero’s lunacy. The sale of cinnamon was the primary component in the legendary spice trade between Europe and the Far East. The Arab traders who conducted this trade were careful to maintain their monopoly by concealing the Asian sources of the spice and subsequent European exploration into Asia was to a large extent motivated by a desire to break that monopoly and cash in on the huge profits to be made in selling cinnamon to the West. The deliberate mystery which shrouded the origins of cinnamon resulted, over the centuries, not only in high prices, but in an intriguing series of myths and legends.

*“Its source was kept mysterious in the Mediterranean world over the centuries by the middlemen who handled the spice trade to protect their monopoly as suppliers...Before the establishment of Cairo, Alexandria was the Mediterranean shipping port of cinnamon. Europeans who knew the Latin writers who were quoting Herodotus knew that cinnamon came up the Red Sea to the trading ports of Egypt but whether from Ethiopia or not was less clear. When Sieur De Joinville accompanied his king to Egypt on crusade in 1248, he reported that what he had been told - and believed - was that cinnamon was fished up in nets as the source of the sacred Nile which marked the end of the world. Through the Middle Ages, the source of cinnamon remained a mystery to the Western world. To Herodotus and other classical authors, Arabia was the source of cinnamon. Giant cinnamon birds collected the cinnamon sticks from an unknown land where the magical cinnamon trees grew and used them to construct their nests. The Arabs employed clever trickery to deprive the birds of the cinnamon sticks. This story was current as late as 1310 in Byzantium although in the 1<sup>st</sup> century Pliny the Elder had*



written that the traders had made all this up in order to charge more for their products...Arab traders brought the spice via overland trade routes to Alexandria in Egypt, where it was bought by Venetian traders from Italy who held a monopoly on the spice trade in Europe. The disruption of this trade by other Mediterranean powers, such as the Malmuk sultans and the Ottoman Empire was one of many factors which led European to search more widely for other trade routes to Asia." (Wikipedia – "Cinnamon")

The identification of "**fragrant cane**" (Hebrew – "*qaneh bosem*") is somewhat more ambiguous. Although this spice is mentioned frequently in the Old Testament, none of the texts specifically identify it beyond the fact that it comes from "**a distant land.**" The majority of modern commentators identify "**fragrant cane**" "*calamus oderatus*" an aromatic grass imported from India. The NIV's translation reflects that view. "**You have not brought any calamus for Me or lavished on Me the fat of your sacrifices.**" (Isaiah 43 :28) "**What do I care about incense from Sheba, or sweet calamus from a distant land? Your burnt offering are not acceptable. Your sacrifices do not please Me.**" (Jeremiah 6:20) "**Danites and Greeks from Uzal bought your merchandise. They exchanged wrought iron, cassia and calamus for your wares.**" (Ezekiel 27:19) "**Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices.**" (Song of Solomon 4:14)



"Calamus Oderatus"

The fourth of the spices is the Hebrew "*qidda*." The term only appears in one other Biblical reference, the Ezekiel 27:19 passage previously cited. Some associate "*qidda*" with "*cassia*" - as in the NIV's translation. Cassia is an aromatic powder obtained from the blossoms of the "*cinnamomum ceylanic*" a particular type of cinnamon tree which grows only on the island of Ceylon, modern nation of Sri Lanka. Others prefer a derivation from a Sanskrit term – "*kunda*" used to identify a variety of aromatic herbs obtained from parts of the balsam tree for use in religious incense. The evidence is not conclusively in favor of either view. All of these precious herbs were to be blended together into "**a hin of olive**

*oil.*” Olive oil served as the typical base component of ointments and oils because of its absorbent qualities. A *“hin”* equals a little more than three quarts.

***“Make these into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. It will be the sacred anointing oil.”*** The text places particular emphasis on the professional skill with which the anointing oil was to be prepared. This task was to be undertaken by one who had been carefully trained in the ancient arts of Egypt, a civilization which had been renowned for centuries for its expertise in this area. For the Egyptians these skills were not only to serve the needs of the wealthy elites in the court of pharaoh but were also a central component in Egyptian religion and its preoccupation with the preparation of the bodies of the dead which would enable the soul to survive in the afterlife. ***“The work of a perfumer”*** was a prolonged complex of distillation during which the spices were repeatedly boiled in mixtures of oil and water, carefully drawing the essence of each of their fragrances into the oil in precisely the correct proportion to ultimately produce the proper aroma. Given the religious context in which much of this material was to be used, this process was frequently carried out within the temples of Egypt under the meticulous supervision of devout priests. The Book of Job alludes to the fierce boiling which characterized this work in its description of the fiery sea monster Leviathan, who causes the waters of the sea to froth and boil ***“like a pot of ointment”***:



***“The Sea Monster Leviathan”***

***“His undersides are jagged potsherds, leaving a trail in the mud like a threshing sledge. He makes the depths churn like a boiling cauldron and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment. Behind him he leaves a glistening wake. One would think that the sea had white hair.”*** (Job 41:30 - 32)

Commentator William H.C. Propp notes the complexity of this process:

***“Because the manner of the combination would be known to any perfumer, it is left unstated. To the uninformed reader, however, it is not clear how one imparts the essence of some thirty - eight pounds of herbs to three quarts of oil. They cannot simply be mixed like salad dressing. Job 41:30 - 33 implies that ‘compounder’s work’ involves boiling. The Talmud preserves one method for imparting scent to oil, corroborated by***



*“The Design of The Golden Furnishing Of The Tabernacle” by Mortier – 1700*

*Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and classical sources. Moreover, archaeological evidence of a Judean perfume industry have been found at En Gedi. The herbs were soaked in water and oil and then either the water was boiled away or the oil skimmed off Thus savor was transferred from the spices to the water to the oil. For a few drops of scented oil, one expended a large quantity of extremely valuable stuff - which is why perfume was - and is - so costly. Josephus reports that the second Temple possessed among its treasures large quantities of spices.” (Propp, II. P. 438)*

The extremely precious nature of the ingredients for the anointing oil and complexity of the elaborate process by which it was to be made are designed to indicate the sanctity of the Tabernacle and its priesthood. This was the place where the miracle of God’s gracious presence in the midst of His people had been promised and these were the men whom God had called to carry out a ministry of representing God’s people before Him in the ceremonies and rituals which He Himself had ordained to foreshadow the coming of the Messiah. The appropriateness of this response to the wonder of God’s presence has been reinforced across the past two thousand years by the fact that the finest work of Christendom’s most gifted architects, painters, and sculptors has been dedicated to the glory of God in the construction and adornment of churches. Such effort and expense is often condemned in our day as needless extravagance, a misuse of resources which could



*“The Construction of Tabernacle” by Mortier – 1700*

better be used to help the poor or carry out mission work. These objections miss the point of Christian art and the message of grateful adoration and awe which it is designed to convey. Charity and missions are not an alternative to beautiful churches adorned with the finest art. This dare not be perceived as an either - or choice. Rather, these are complementary dimensions of the believer’s response to the wonder of God’s grace. Declaring His glory and demonstrating His compassion are two sides of the same coin. Both can and should be acts of worship. Everything the church does must be motivated by a fervent desire to enhance – *“The Glory of God and The Salvation of Man”* - as expressed in the well - chosen words of the cornerstone of the Mountain Church in Seiffen.

***“Then use it to anoint the Tent of Meeting...”*** - The ceremonial anointing involved the Tabernacle itself, its sacred furnishings, and the priests who would carry out the services which God had commanded. The sprinkling of the oil of anointing would serve to consecrate and set apart this sanctuary and its servants for the tasks that God had for them. The few drops of oil applied in each case were the symbol of the blessings of God which would enable this sacred ministry. The limited amount of oil to be used in this instance is clear from the list of ingredients for the oil in comparison to the scope of the items to which it was to be applied.

*“Here too the exegetes have found a difficulty since they hold that the limited quantity of oil could not suffice for this purpose. But they confused anointing with smearing. This verse does not mean that the oil was to be spread over the entire surface of the articles of furniture, vessels, curtains and beams, but that one or two drops of the oil were to be sprinkled (Leviticus 8:11) upon one end of each object; that was all (according to Talmudic tradition, the anointing was done in the form of a Greek Chi (X). It was further objected that the oil would spoil the beautiful curtains of the Tabernacle, but this objection also falls away when we realize that the text here has in mind merely the sprinkling of drops. If a small oil stain were left at the edge of the curtains, this would not be a blemish, but a tangible sign that they had been properly consecrated.” (Cassutto, p. 398)*

***“You shall consecrate them so that they will be most holy, and whatever touches them will be most holy.”*** - The act of anointing was designed to indicate that an object, a person, a place, or a time had been set apart by God from everything that was ordinary or profane for His own use. As the result of their ritual anointing, the Tabernacle and its furnishings ***“will be most holy.”*** The Hebrew term *“qadosh”* (*“holy”*) occurs in a variety of forms as a noun, verb, or adjective nearly 900 times throughout the Old Testament, its frequency indicating the central importance of the concept. Its root meaning of separation takes on the moral connotation of separation from anything that is sinful, evil or corrupt to reflect the goodness and righteousness of the holy God. Isaiah depicts the Lord seated upon his glorious heavenly throne surrounded by the seraphim proclaiming an eternal trishagion: ***“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Heaven and earth are full of His glory.”*** (Isaiah 6:3)



***“One of the Six Winged Serephim”  
Greek Orthodox Mural***

*“Holiness is the chief attribute of God and a quality to be developed in His people...The primary OT word for holiness means ‘to cut’ or ‘to separate.’ Fundamentally holiness is a cutting off or separation from what is unclean, and a consecration to what is pure. In the Old Testament, holiness as applied to God signifies His transcendence over creation and the moral perfection of*

*His character. God is holy in that He is utterly distinct from His creation and exercises sovereign majesty and power over it. His holiness is especially prominent in the Psalms and the prophets, where holiness emerges as a synonym for Israel's God. Thus Scripture ascribes to God the titles 'Holy' (Isaiah 57:15); 'Holy One' (Job 6:10; Isaiah 43:15); and 'Holy One Of Israel' (Psalm 89:18; Isaiah 60:14; Jeremiah 50:29). In the OT God's holiness denotes that the Lord is separate from all that is evil and defiled (Job 34: 10). His holy character is the standard of absolute moral perfection (Isaiah 5:16)...In the OT God demanded holiness in the lives of His people. Through Moses God said to the congregation of Israel: 'You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God am holy.' (Leviticus 19:2)" (BEB, I, p. 984)*

In this phrase the text uses the term ***“most holy”*** once again indicating the degrees of holiness which pertained in the design of the Tabernacle and subsequently the Temple. The level of sanctity appears to have been the result of proximity to the Ark of the Covenant within the Holy of Holies which was designated as the throne upon which God condescended to dwell in the midst of His people. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* describes the manner in which the Tabernacle texts indicate the degrees of holiness within the Sanctuary and its furnishings:

*“Location, materials, lethality and cultic importance of the pieces suggest a gradation of holiness with the ark being the highest, the outer altar and laver being the lowest. The ark is located in the adytum the innermost sanctuary of a temple; the table, lampstand, and incense altar in the shrine; the burnt offering altar and the laver in the court. The ark, table, lampstand and incense altar are all made of pure gold, while the burnt offering altar and laver are made of copper. When transported, the ark is covered in the Tabernacle veil, a skin cover, and then a completely blue cloth; the table is wrapped in a regular blue cloth, a scarlet cloth, then a skin cover; the lamp and the incense altar are wrapped in a regular blue cloth and a skin cover; and the outer altar in a purple cloth, then a skin cover. The gold furniture is lethal by sight to non-priests, but the copper pieces are not - they are on public display. Lastly, the ark is the most important piece of furniture; it is the place where God manifests Himself, and it may be the sole piece of sanctum which was not to be seen at all...The furniture appears to be more holy relative to the tent structure's planks, columns, bars, footings, lower cover and entrance hanging which are also most holy. The pieces of furniture are made of or covered with pure gold, while the planks, covers and bars are covered with plain gold. The furniture pieces are prohibited to the touch and sight of the Levites on pain of death. They are carefully wrapped by the priests, while the planks, columns, bars, footings, cover and entrance hanging are not so lethal, nor are they covered. The furniture pieces are carried on the Levites shoulders, while the planks, covers, and other items are transported in wagons. The ark and the*

other holy furniture are brought to Solomon's new Temple and put to use there. These articles are guarded and carried by priests and Levites." (T ABD, III, p. 240)



*"The Ark Of The Covenant With The Holy Of Holies In Solomon's Temple" by Mortier*

***"And whatever touches them will be holy."*** - Once again, as in Exodus 29:37, the NIV's translation misrepresents the sense of the Hebrew text. This translation suggests some sort of contagious holiness, which can be magically transferred by simple physical contact. Such fantasies are the stuff of superstition not Biblical reality. The verb here translated ***"they will be holy"*** occurs only in these two Exodus texts and a similar pair of verses in Leviticus 6:11, 20. Rabbi Moshe Shamah, quoted at length in our discussion of the previous text, cites the consistent understanding of the teachers of Judaism that the Hebrew verb should be translated as *"should sanctify himself."* This translation avoids the unfortunate magical superstition of its alternative and simply teaches that any priest who is about to come into contact with the sacred Tabernacle or its furnishings should first have completed the required ritual cleansing and purification. The concept of contagious holiness transmitted by inadvertent physical contact is specifically repudiated by Hagai 2:12: ***"If a person carries consecrated meat in the fold of his garment, and that fold touches some***

*bread or stew, some wine, oil, or other food, does it become consecrated? The priests answered, 'No.'*" (Haggai 2:12)

### **Verses 30 - 33**

*Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so that they may serve me as priests. Say to the Israelites, "This is to be My sacred anointing oil for the generations to come. Do not pour it on men's bodies and do not make any oil with the same formula. It is sacred, and you are to consider it sacred. Whoever makes perfume like it, and whoever puts it on anyone other than a priest must be cut off from his people."*

*"Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them..."* - Like the sanctuary and its furnishings, the priests who had been chosen by God to minister within the Tabernacle were to be anointed, that is, set apart from the rest of the nation of Israel, to serve the Lord and His people in this unique way. The distinction between *"Aaron and his sons"* and other Israelites is emphasized by the use of the parallel phrase *"Israel and his sons"* at the beginning of the next sentence. This parallel is overlooked in most English translations. These priestly anointings had already been commanded in Exodus 28:41 at the conclusion of the design instructions for the vestments of the priests: *"After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so that they may serve Me as priests."* The repetition of the instruction here serves to define the similarity between the holiness of the shrine itself and its priesthood. *"In effect, the Israelites understood that the anointing of the Tabernacle and its furniture, and Aaron and his sons and their clothing (29:7, 21, 41) showed that they were setting aside these things for God, consigning them to His realm and special possession."* (Stuart, p. 644) God established the ceremony of anointing the priesthood as a visual confirmation of the priesthood's divine



*"The Consecration Of The Tabernacle And The Priesthood"*



calling – *“so that they may serve Me as priests.”* However, the text does suggest that there is more happening here than mere symbolism. The words *“so that they may serve me as priests”* that a divine enabling occurs in the application of the anointing oil. Through the action which God has instituted, He conveys His blessing and the power which accompanies that blessing upon those who are anointed and ordained. There is, accordingly, a sacramental dimension to the anointing. *“Anointment in the Ancient Near East not only symbolized the special authority conferred on the king or the priest being anointed, it also bestowed, through the life giving oil, what Noth calls ‘permanent additional vital energy.’”* (Durham, p. 407) The New Testament continues to use the image of anointing as the seal of God’s ownership upon the believer, which sets him apart from the corruption and deception of the world. The ceremony of anointing is linked to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the believer by means of which he belongs to God in Christ: *“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”* (2 Corinthians 1:21 - 22) John assured Christians that they would not fall prey to the deceptions of the Evil One because they had been anointed to belong to God:



*“Icon Of Christ As The Anointed King”*

*“But you have an anointing from the Holy One and all of you know the truth ...As for you, the anointing you received from Him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as His anointing teaches you about all things, and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as it was taught you, remain in Him.”* (I John 2:20, 27)

The ultimate fulfillment of anointing as the outpouring of God’s power must be seen in the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ. Psalm 45 foretells the coming of the Messianic King with repeated references to anointing and the precious spices used in the anointing oil:

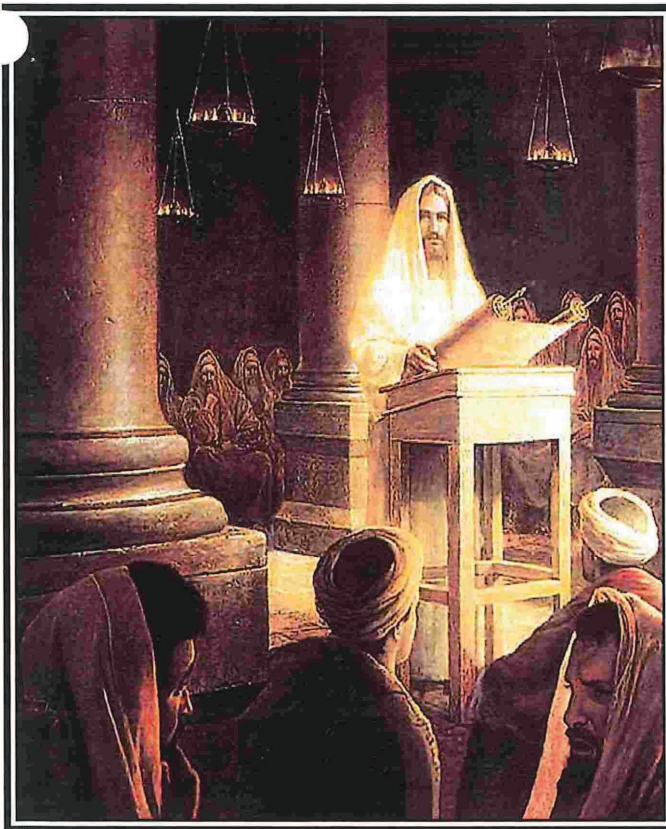
*“You are the most excellent of men, and your lips have been anointed with grace, since God has blessed you forever...Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.”*

*You love righteousness and hate wickedness, therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory, the music of the strings makes you glad.”* (Psalm 45:2, 7 - 9)

The theme of the Anointed One continues to figure prominently throughout the New Testaments proclamation of Jesus as the Savior. The Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, quoted these verses from Psalm 45 to prove the identity of Jesus as the Anointed One, the Son of God:

*“But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed Heir of all thing and through whom He made the universe...But about the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God will last forever and ever and righteousness will be the scepter of Your kingdom...You have love righteousness and hated wickedness, therefore God, Your God, has set You above Your companions by anointing You with the oil of joy.’”* Hebrews 1:2, 8 - 9)

Our Lord Himself used Isaiah’s prophecy of the Anointed One in His first public proclamation of Himself as the promised Savior before the astounded members of the synagogue in Nazareth:



*“He went to Nazareth where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day He went to the synagogue as was His custom. And He stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He has anointed Me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him and He began by saying to them, ‘Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”* (Luke 4:16 - 21)

*“Today This Is Fulfilled In Your Hearing”*

In his magnificent sermon to the household

of Cornelius, Peter used this Old Testament theme to identify Christ as the Messiah and explain the significance of His ministry: ***“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him.”*** (Acts 10:38)

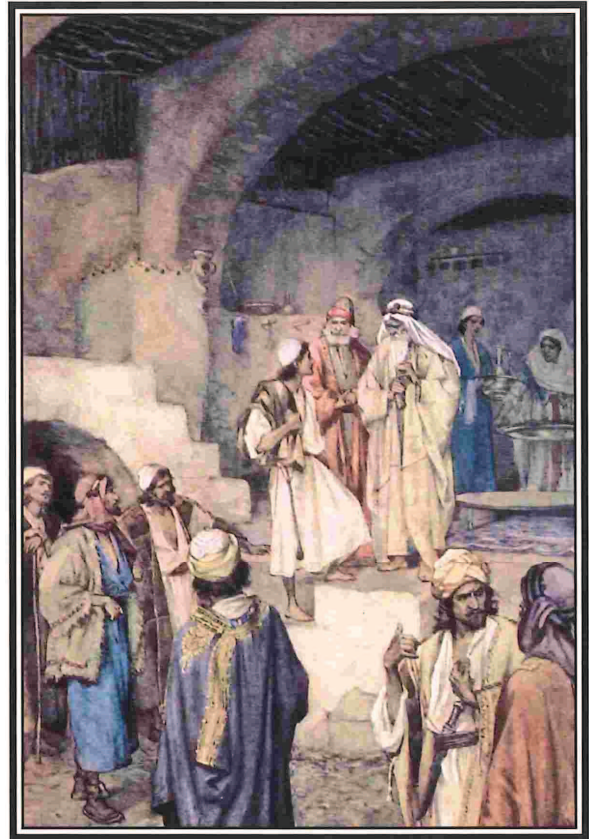
***“Say to the Israelites, ‘This is to be My sacred anointing oil for the generations to come.’”*** –

The ceremonial anointing of the priests was to become a permanent part of the practice of Judaism. Interestingly, the Talmud understands the phrase ***“This is to be My sacred anointing oil for the generations to come”*** as a promise that the original supply of oil manufactured in the days of Moses would never be exhausted, but would be miraculous replenished by God forever. This anointing oil was to be strictly reserved for the use of the Tabernacle/Temple and its priests. Subsequently, the ritual of divine anointing would also be extended to the kings of Israel by divine command (cf. I Samuel 9:16;

15:1; 2 Kings 9:3; I Chronicles 29:22). At times, prophets were also anointed, as in the case of Elisha (cf. I Kings 19:16) The text gives no indication of the frequency with which the anointing was to be performed, either for the Tabernacle or the priests. In the initial consecration of the priesthood not only Aaron and his sons, but all the priests were to be anointed. It would seem that thereafter only the high priest was anointed at the beginning of his lifetime appointment to office. Psalm 133:2 offers a graphic description of the anointing of the High Priest: ***“It is like precious oil poured out on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's head, upon the collar of his robes.”*** There is no indication in Scripture that the Tabernacle or its furnishings required repeated anointing although some scholars deduce from the annual anointing of the altars with blood on the Day of Atonement that the entire Tabernacle was reconsecrated at least annual. For example, Douglas Stuart concludes:

*“On the assumption that a full re - anointing would take place each time the Tabernacle was unpacked and set up as a worship center, the frequency of reanointing could only remain unspecified. The minimum interval for reanointing would be once a year (30:10), but the maximum could be much more often.”* (Stuart, p. 644)

The sacred formula of precious ingredients was not to be duplicated for any profane



***“Samuel Anointing David As King”***  
***by Sir. William Hole***

purpose. The punishment for the duplication or desecration of the anointing oil was that the offender ***“must be cut off from his people.”*** The meaning of this phrase varies in different contexts. It appears to be a general expression for coming under divine punishment. The typical rabbinic interpretation of these words was that the guilty party would die prematurely without children. However, in some instances the phrase can refer to either excommunication or execution.

*“Cut off from the community of Israel’ is general language for coming under divine sentence. How this was carried out varies from instance to instance. It might mean the penalty of execution (***“Anyone who desecrates the Sabbath must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people.”*** Exodus 31:14 - 15), banishment, or death without children. Those coming under this divine sentence were no longer reckoned as a part of the covenant community and lost their rights and privileges in it.” (Mackay, p. 215)*

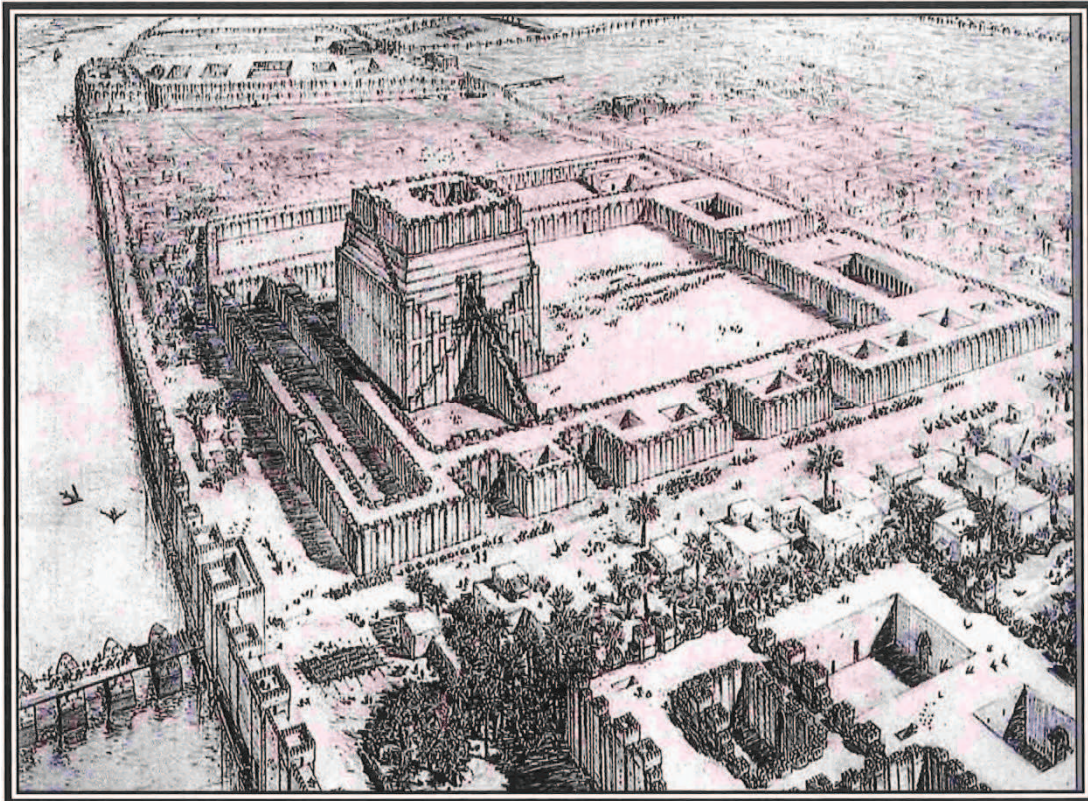


*“The High Priest At The Altar of Incense”*

### ***Verses 34 - 38***

*Then the Lord said to Moses, “Take fragrant spices - gum, resin, onycha and galbanum - and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred. Grind some of it to powder and place it in front of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the Lord. Whoever makes any like it to enjoy its fragrance, must be cut off from his people.”*

*“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Take fragrant spices...” - The crucial rule of incense in the worship of the Tabernacle as a symbol of the prayers of the people rising up before the Lord in heaven and the guidelines for its use upon the Golden Altar of Incense in front of the barrier curtain between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies had been specified previously in this Chapter (vss. 1 - 10) . This emphasis is consistent with the prominent use of incense throughout the ancient Middle East. Hebrew scholar Benzinger summarizes the*



*“The Massive Temple of Bel-Marduk Towering Over Ancient Babylon”  
Reconstruction Sketched by Archaeologist Anton Koldeway*

Benzinger summarized the extravagant use of incense among the religions of the nations neighboring Palestine in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*:

*“The offering of incense was widely practiced in the ancient oriental religions. That it was a common adjunct of Egyptian worship is evident from the fact that in the representations of worship the king is almost always pictured with a censer in his hand offering incense. Enormous quantities of spices were used every year for this purpose by the temples. According to one list, Pharaoh Rameses III presented during the thirty - one years of his reign 368,461 jars and 1,933,766 pieces of incense, honey and oil. Incense is mentioned just as frequently in the Babylonian-Assyrian cult. According to Herodotus, at the great yearly feast of Bel, 1,000 talents (129,000 pounds) were burned upon his great altar.” (Benzinger, JE – “Incense”)*

The text which described the role of the incense altar, however, did not specify the ingredients which would make up the incense to be offered or the formula by which to combine them. Having just provided the precise formula for the oil of anointing, the text now continues to specify the formula for the Tabernacle incense. Five spices are listed for inclusion in the Tabernacle incense. The rabbis of the Talmud considered this listing to be incomplete, inadequate to produce the necessary result for the worship of the Temple. By the time of the second Temple, the number of ingredients had been expanded to eleven

within the oral traditions of the rabbis. They contended that the need for additional spices was implied in the Exodus text by the repetition of the word spices. Contemporary Rabbi Avraham Sutton presents the convoluted argument in support of the expansion:

*“We mentioned above that the written Torah mentions the four main spices (‘samim) in the incense. It is only through oral transmission that we know of the other seven, making a total of eleven. The sages, nonetheless, take the trouble to let us know how the extra seven are alluded to in the terse language of the written Torah. Again, on the same page of the Talmud (Keritot 6b), they explain thus: The verse says: ‘Take for yourself spices - balsam, onycha, galbanum, spices and pure frankincense.’ If the Torah only meant that the four main substances should be taken, and nothing else, it should simply have said, ‘Take for yourself balsam, onycha, galbanum and pure frankincense.’ The Torah uses the word “spices” repeated twice. This indicates that there were other spices. Since the Torah does not designate what they are, it seems obvious that the first mention of the word “spice” (after “take for yourself”) would denote two different spices, since the minimum number that the plural form that the plural form ‘samim’ can be is two. Then we have the balsam, onycha and galbanum, bringing us to a total of five. The Torah then mentions ‘samim’ again to tell us that in addition to these five there were to be an additional five. This doubles the amount making a total of ten. If the second ‘samim’ only denoted two, the Torah would have said, ‘Take for yourselves spices - balsam, onycha...’ Since the Torah divides them, it means that they*



*“Onycha Shells Harvested From the Red Sea”*

were not the same. Therefore, the first time the word 'samim' is mentioned denotes two spices, the second the second time it denotes five. Therefore, from the two times that the word 'samim' occurs we learn that there were seven spices besides the four mentioned, making a total of eleven." (Sutton, pp. 15 - 16)

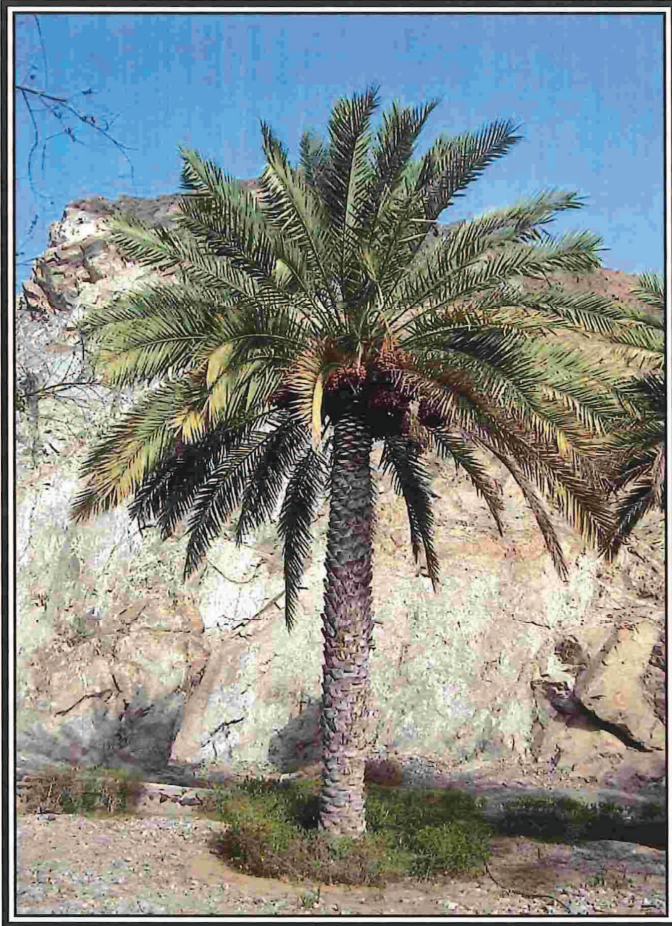
In the mystical imaginings of the Hebrew Kabbalah all of these numbers are provided with profound spiritual significance as a hidden code which links the sacred incense to the creation of the world, etc. I cite all of this fanciful nonsense here only to illustrate the manner in which oral tradition and human imagination digress ever further from the plain words of Scripture to concoct elaborate whatever significance and application the practitioners of a particular tradition require. This problematic tendency is not, unfortunately, limited to Judaism, but to every religion in which human opinions, feelings, dreams, visions, personal revelations, etc. are placed on a par with the written Word of God.



*Pharoah Rameses III Depicted Burning Incense and Pouring Out Anointing Oil Before The Great God Amun Ra*

By the time of the second Temple the precise method for preparing and combining the incense was a secret known only to a priestly family called the Abtinases. They alone were capable of blending the eleven spices in such a way that they would ascend within the Holy Place *"in the form of a date palm,"* that is the smoke would rise from the incense altar in a thick column like the trunk of a date palm tree and then spread out just below the ceiling to fill the entire Holy Place like the outstretched branches of a date palm tree. The Talmud reported the dilemma caused by the Abitinases's sole possession of the secret as the source of bitter controversy within the Temple priesthood:

*"In Herodian times, the preparation of the incense was a kind of privilege which was maintained in the family of Abtinases which was thought to be in possession of special directions for making it. They were particularly credited for causing the smoke of the incense offering to rise in the form of the stem of a date tree. When it reached the ceiling, it spread out and descended and covered the whole space. The smoke from incense prepared by other apothecaries spread irregularly as it rose. The family would not divulge the secret of its art, and consequently was driven from office. Apothecaries from*



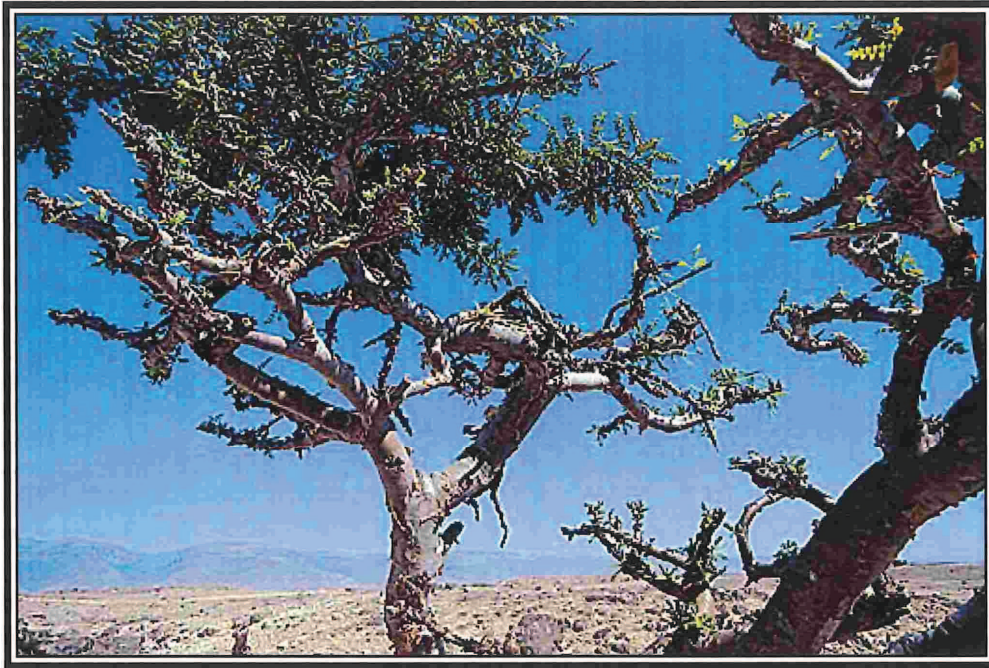
*A Date Palm Tree Growing In A Desert Oasis*

*Alexandria were sent for who were proficient in incense making but they could not secure smoke which rose regularly. The Abtinases were, therefore, recalled, but they demanded double the pay which they had previously received. They gave as a reason for their secrecy that, anticipating the destruction of the Temple, they feared that the secret might be used later in idolatrous services. The rabbis, however, severely criticized the Abtinases for their selfishness. The Mishnah records their name as infamous. Rabbi Johanan ben Nari tells of meeting an old man of the Abtinases family carrying a scroll containing a list of the ingredients used in the composition of the incense. The old man surrendered the scroll to Rabbi Johanan since the Abtinases were no longer trustworthy. When Rabbi Akiba heard of this, he shed tears, and said, 'From now on we must never mention their name with blame.'*” (Benzinger, JE, “Incense”)

“**Gum resin,**” the first of the four spices listed in the text is the translation of a Hebrew word which means “*to drip.*” The reference here is to the fragrant resin of a species of balsam tree which grows in Arabia. The second spice, “**onycha**” refers to a powder obtained from the shell of a small marine mollusk found in the Red Sea. The shell is shaped like a fingernail and accordingly the Hebrew term literally means “*nail.*” “**Galbanum**” is a powder produced from the dried sap of a bushy tree which grows in the mountains of Persia and Turkey. The odor produced by this substance used alone is pungent and bitter. However, when combined with other spices it serves to enhance and intensify their smells. That was evidently its function in the incense of the Tabernacle. The rabbis found in the use of this bitter herb a lesson on toleration toward those who are sinful and unworthy. Rabbi Schneerson comments:

*“The fact that galbanum is included even though it has a displeasing odor, teaches you that you should not exclude wrongdoers from participating in public prayer. This foul smelling herb alludes to the wrongdoers among our people, who, despite their repugnant behavior, are still an indispensable part of the Jewish nation, just as galbanum was an essential part of the incense. In this vein, our sages teach that any public prayer or fast that excludes sinners will be ineffectual.”* (Schneerson, p. 244)





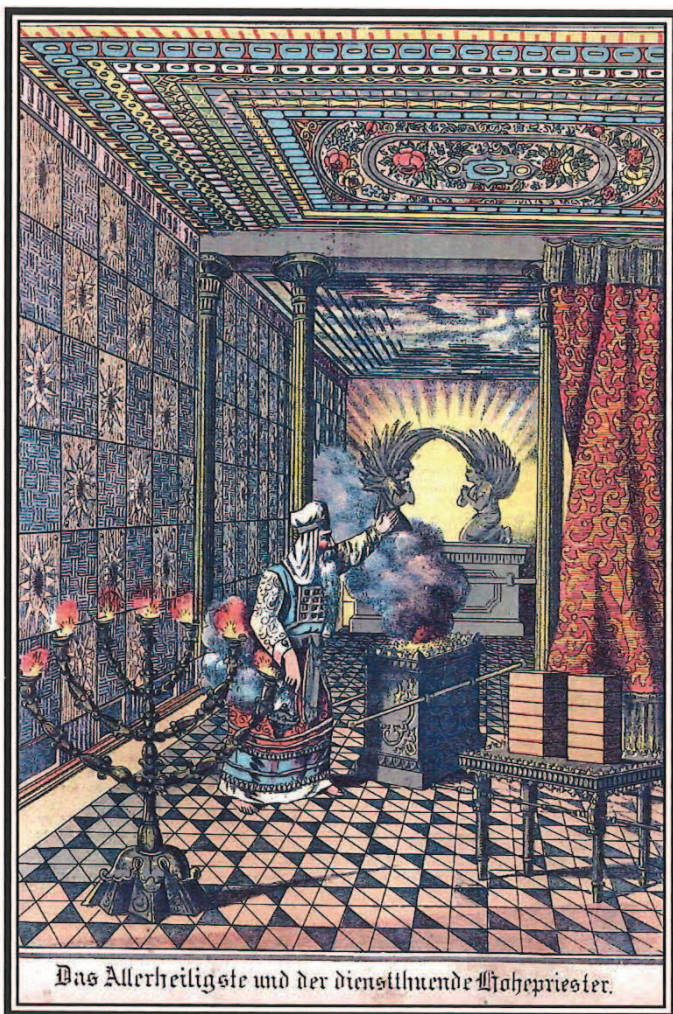
*A Grove of Galbanum Trees In Southern Ethiopia*

The best known of the enumerated spices is “*frankincense*.” Like myrrh, frankincense is harvested from a rugged tree which grows in the rocky deserts of Arabia and Ethiopia. The bark of the tree is carefully slashed and the resin bleeds through the wound to form small white bubbles or pearls. This material has been a popular component in incense and perfume throughout history.

As noted previously, the rabbinic commentaries add seven more spices to this list. They include myrrh, cassia, spikenard, saffron, costus, aromatic bark and cinnamon. Maimonides, the foremost rabbi of the Medieval Judaism (12 Century) reported the tradition that the myrrh in the incense and the anointing oil was actually derived from the blood of a wild animal that could be found only in the remote wilds of India. His renowned commentary on the Torah states: “*Myrrh refers to the blood contained within a wild beast from India which is in use by people everywhere and is renowned for its fragrance.*” Orthodox Judaism, using the secret mystic categories of the Kabbalah, perceives the inclusion of galbanum – the bitter herb - and myrrh - the blood of an unclean beast - in the incense as a symbolic affirmation of the indissoluble bond between God and the Jewish people, no matter how disobedient or unfaithful they may be.

*“In fact, the ingredients of the incense included even forbidden spices. The myrrh was actually the blood of a non - kosher wild animal from India. The incense expressed the intrinsic connection between God and the Jewish people, which can be neither severed nor sullied...The same is true of repentance which we express through fasting. When repenting, we ask God to overlook or forgive our sins in response to our efforts to tap into our deepest and most essential connection with Him, which never loses its purity. By getting in touch with this aspect of our souls, referred to in the Kabbalah as*

*'yekidah' ('single one'), we are able to rise above our past misdeeds and the separation that they cause between God and us. We learn to consciously relate to the level of reality in which we never truly went astray, for our yekidah's intrinsic relationship with its source is unwavering. Clearly, the same essential connection to God belongs to every Jew without exception. If we exclude sinners in the course of our communal process of repentance and atonement, we are being hypocritical, our efforts are doomed to failure. It is only by recognizing that the very same path of repentance is open to every Jew, that we can hope to actualize the message of the incense, and properly rejuvenate our relationship with God.'* (Schneerson, p. 244)



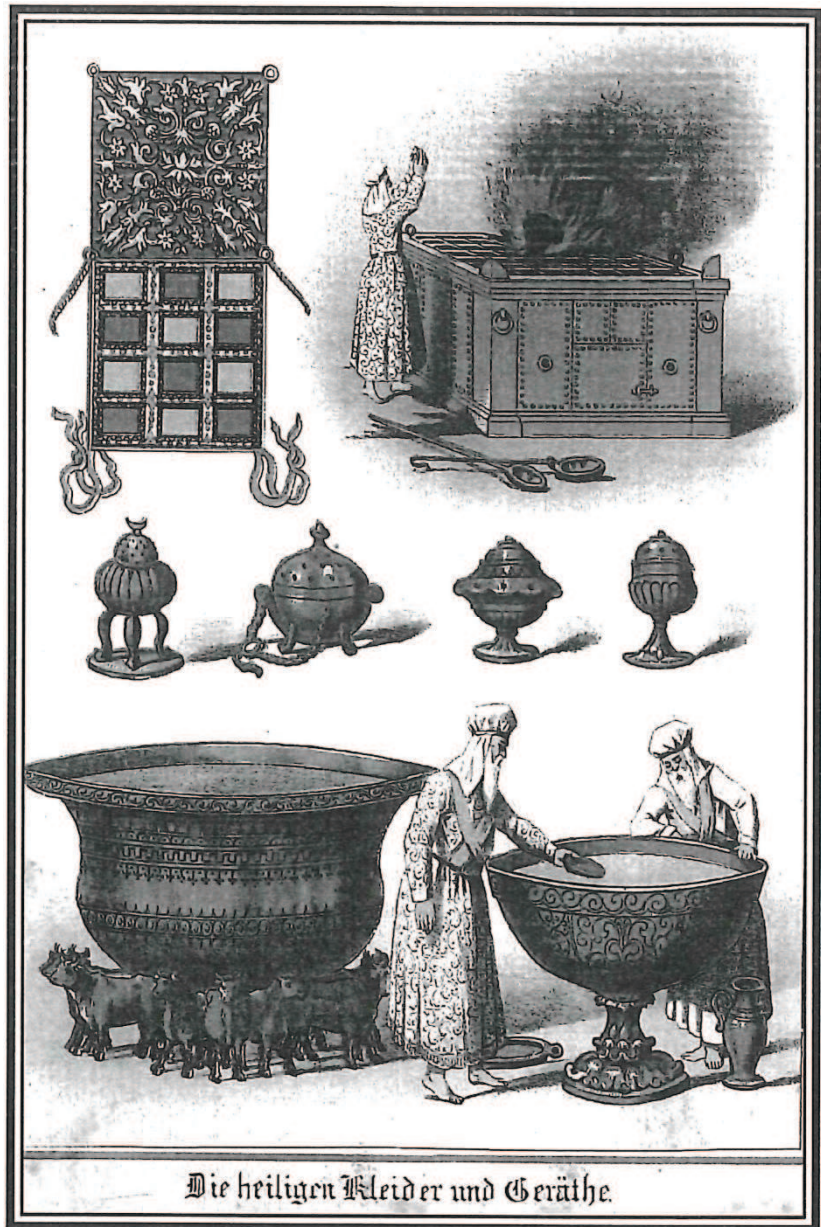
*19<sup>th</sup> Century German Bible Engraving of the Ministry of the High Priest At The Incense Altar In the Tabernacle With the Curtain Drawn Back To Reveal the Ark From the Hillegeist Family Bible*

***“It is to be salted, and pure and sacred.”*** - Once the spices had been carefully ground and combined – ***“the work of a perfumer”*** - granules of salt were to be added to enhance the rate of burning and smoking. Ancient Mesopotamian texts indicate that this was common practice among the temples of the region in their preparation of ceremonial incense. The primary use of salt in ancient times was as a preservative. Thus it took on the symbolic significance of that which was to be binding and permanent. In this sense the Bible refers to God’s commitment to Israel as ***“a covenant of salt.”*** ***“Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the Lord, I give to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the Lord for both you and your offspring.”*** (Numbers 18:19) ***“Don’t you know that the God of Israel has given the kingship of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a covenant of salt.”*** (2 Chronicles 13:5)

***“Grind some of it to powder and place it in front of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting where I will meet with you.”*** –

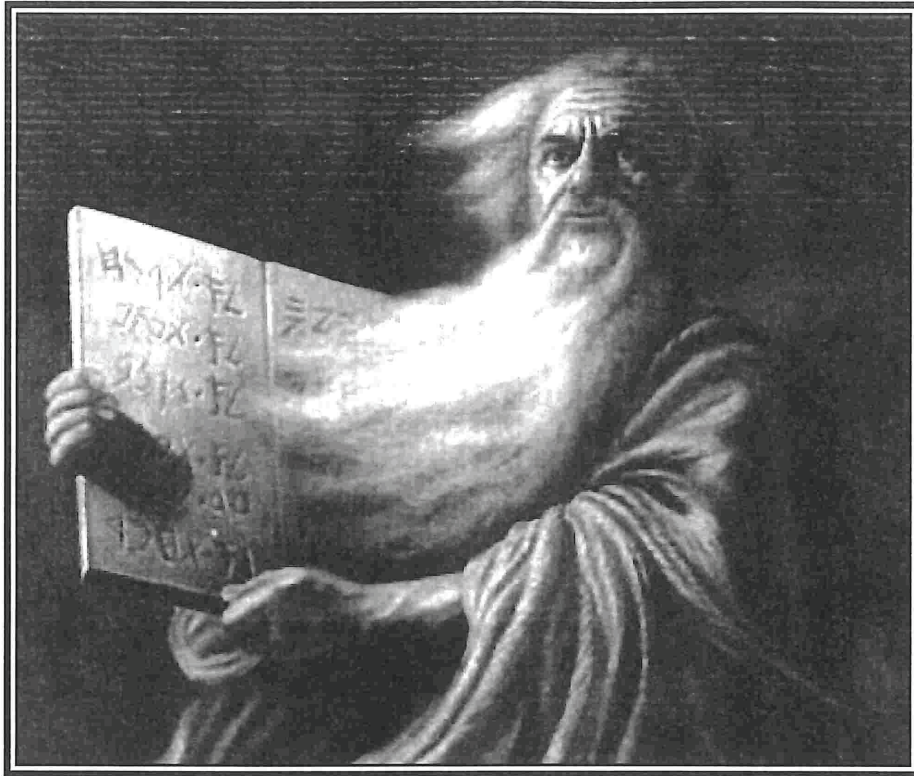
The sacred incense was to be burned each and every day, morning and evening upon the altar of incense. The altar stood immediately before the curtain which shielded the Holy of Holies and the Ark of the Covenant which it contained. The Ark is identified as ***“the***

*Testimony*” in that it was the physical site which testified to the presence of God in the midst of His people according to His promise. The designation of the Tabernacle as *“the Tent of Meeting”* offers exactly the same assurance. In this place, designed by God, and in the worship which occurs here according to God's institution, God's graciously dwells among His own. The repetitious language – *“the Tent of Meeting where I will meet with you”* makes this crucial point with particular emphasis. The placement of the incense altar, as close to the Ark as possible without violating the sanctity of the Holy of Holies, allows the clear visual image of the prayers of the people ascending before their God. The proximity of the incense altar and the column of fragrant smoke which ascended from it to the Ark would also allow the smoke to penetrate over and around the curtain to enter the Holy of Holies and literally surround the earthly throne of God thereby indicating the acceptance of the prayers of Israel by the God of the covenant. All of this carefully designed symbolism conveyed a powerfully comforting message of comfort and assurance to the Children of Israel from the Lord.



*“The Holy Vestments and Furnishings”  
19<sup>th</sup> Century German Bible Illustration  
From the Hillegeist Family Bible*

*“It shall be most holy to you. Do not make any incense with this formula...”* – The incense segment concludes with the same stern admonition against any profane use of the incense which had followed the establishment of the anointing oil. This incense was only to be used for the worship of God in the rituals of the Tabernacle which He had ordained. The ominous punishment – *“Whoever makes any like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from his people”* - is also repeated (cf. Vs. 33). This was not a matter to be taken lightly.



*Moses Receives The Two Tablets Of The Testimony Upon Mount Sinai*

### *Exodus Chapter 31*

*(1) Then the Lord said to Moses, (2) “See, I have chosen Bealel, son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, (3) and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability, and knowledge of all kinds of crafts - (4) to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver, and bronze, (5) to cut and set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. (6) Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab, son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan to help him. Also I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything that I have commanded you; (7) the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony with the atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the Tent - (8) the table and all its articles, the pure gold lampstand and all its accessories, the altar of incense, (9) the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the basin with its stand - (10) and also the woven garments, both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests, (11) and the anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place. They are to make them just as I commanded you.”*

*(12) Then the Lord said to Moses, (13) “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe My Sabbaths. This will be a sign between you and Me for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord who makes you holy.’ (14) “Observe the Sabbath because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. (15) For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath*

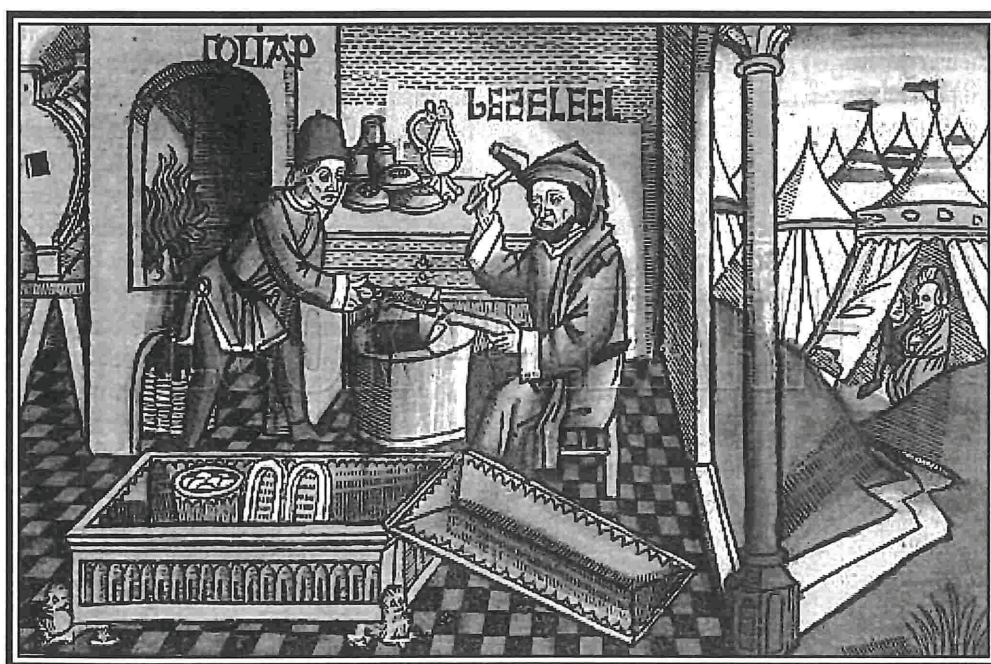
*day must be put to death. (16) The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. (17) It will be a sign between Me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He abstained from work and rested.”*

*(18) When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.*

### **Verses 1 - 5**

*“Then the Lord said to Moses, “See, I have chosen, Bezalel, son of Uri, the son of Hur of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God and with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts - to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.”*

*“Then the Lord said to Moses ...”* - These verses describe the conclusion of God’s revelations to Moses upon the mountain and culminate with the formal presentation of **“the two tablets of the Testimony.”** Their content flows logically and coherently from that which has gone before and serve to set the stage for the prophet’s descent from the Mountain and the crisis which follows. The preceding five chapters have made it very clear that only the finest materials were to be used in the construction of the tabernacle, as the dwelling place of God in the midst of Israel. That theme continues in Chapter 31 as God insists that those who will implement the Lord’s design must be the most skilled craftsmen. It is probable that many Israelites had been trained by the priestly artisans of Egypt, the most ancient and sophisticated culture of the ancient Middle East, to enable them to labor in the construction



*“Luther Bible Illustration Of Bezalel and Oholiab Constructing The Ark”*

and maintenance of the temples of the gods, and the palaces and tombs of the pharaohs. There would have been no better place to acquire the skills necessary to erect a shrine with the exquisite beauty appropriate to honor and glorify the true God. The extended duration of Israel's Egyptian bondage across four centuries provided time for these skills to be honed and enhanced as they were passed down across the generations from father to son with pride and meticulous care. Furthermore, the Lord assured Moses that all of this had been enhanced with a special outpouring of His Holy Spirit to provide talent, ability and dedication to the task which would be genuinely unique – ***“and I have filled him with the Spirit of God and with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts.”*** The preceding texts had repeatedly emphasized that the precious materials for the Tabernacle and its furnishings were only to be produced by the most skilled craftsmen in their various fields. (Cf. 26:1; 28:6, 15, 39; 30:25, 35) God Himself now provided the artisans to carry out that commission.

There are many in the contemporary church who would disparage the role of art as a waste of resources which could more effectively be used in more *“practical”* ways to help the poor or do mission work. The Bible teaches us that these are not *“either/or”* choices. The abundant blessings of God enable us to serve Him through all of these activities and many

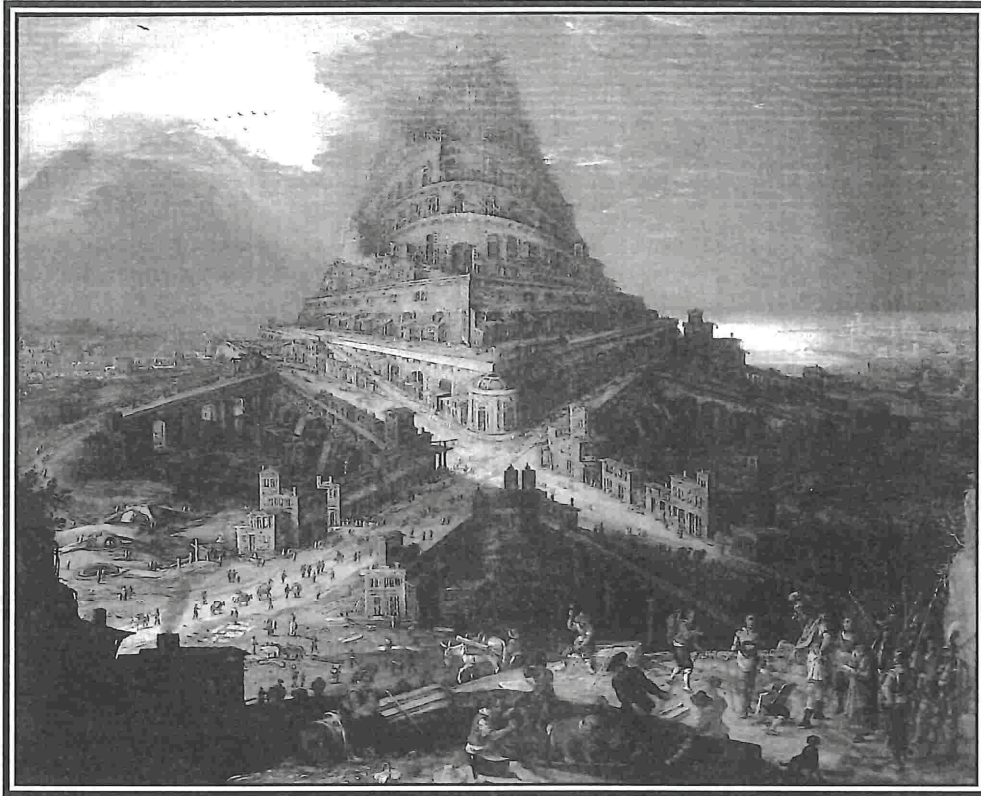


***“Bezalel The Tabernacle Builder”***  
by James Tissot

others. This text, and indeed the entire description of the design and construction of the Tabernacle, demonstrate that art is a precious gift from God and that beautiful artwork is a crucially important way of worshiping God and praising Him for the splendor of His creation. Commentator Phillip Ryken correctly identifies this paragraph the starting point of a theology of art which will continue throughout Scripture:

*“One of the best places to begin constructing a Biblical view of art is Exodus 31, where God calls two men to be artists. This passage teaches at least four fundamental principles for a Biblical theology of the arts: (1) the artist’s call and gift come from God; (2) God loves all kinds of art; (3) God maintains high standards for goodness, truth and beauty; and, (4) art is for the glory of God. To fully understand these principles, we need to understand what they tell us about the character of God and the artistry He displayed in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* (Ryken, p. 947)

God provides the gifts - talent, ability, skill- not merely in art, but in every area of life, and then He calls us to develop and use those skills to His glory in the service



*“The Great Temple of Marduk In Babylon”*

of our neighbor. This Biblical truth was re-emphasized at the time of the Reformation as the doctrine of "vocation" - rejecting the position that only those who worked in the church were truly involved in serving God. Everything that we do should be done *“A.D. G.”* – *“To the Greater Glory of God.”*

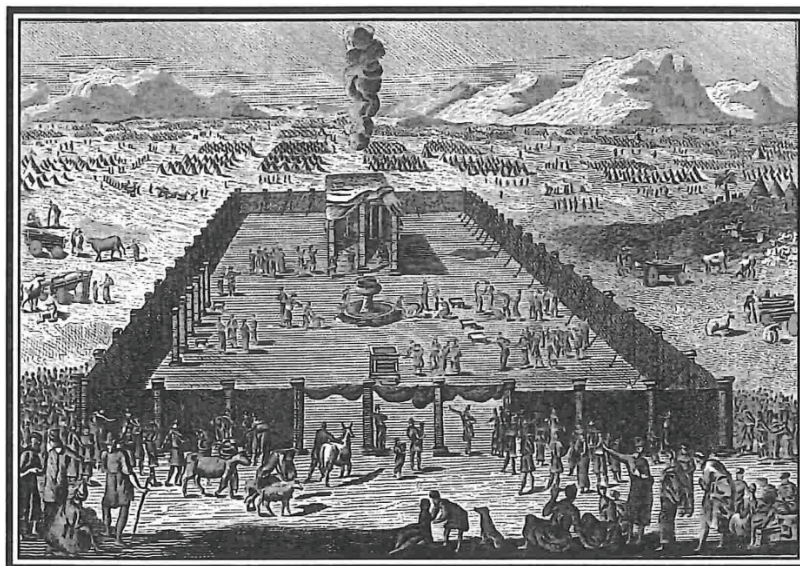
The fact that God deigns to utilize human labor in the construction of His sacred sanctuary is significant. This willingness stands in contrast to the myths and legends of idol religions throughout the region which typically ascribe the construction of their gods' temples to the gods themselves. So, for example, the Babylonians believed that the entire pantheon of their gods and goddesses worked for over a year to construct the grand temple of Marduk in the heart of Babylon. God chose to equip and enable men to build his sanctuary on earth. Later rabbinic commentary would seek to combine the magical myths of the Canaanites with this account to suggest that the most sacred portions of the sanctuary came into being miraculously, but the text does not allow for such superstition:

*“Everything was to be made by human agency in a natural way. It is true that according to later Haggada, which seeks to magnify and glorify the grandeur and magnificence of the Tabernacle, the sanctuary was built miraculously of its own accord; but this is not the meaning inherent in the simple interpretation of the text. On the contrary, Scripture comes, as it were, to oppose the Canaanite legends concerning the building of the temples of their gods by one of the deities themselves.”* (Cassutto, p. 402)

***“I have chosen Bezalel...”*** - The NIV’s translation of the verb with which God describes his selection fails to reflect the intensity and the specificity of the Hebrew. This is particularly powerful language used to indicate the importance of the selection of Bezalel. The Hebrew indicates the personal selection of a particular individual by name. Nahum Sama translates the verb – *“I have singled out by name.”* John Durham reflects the same emphasis in his translation *“I have called out by name.”* The terminology here echoes the language with which God identified the establishment of His covenant relationship with Israel in Isaiah 43:1: ***“But now, this is what the Lord says - He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name and you are Mine.”***

The Hebrew name ***“Bezalel”*** means *“in the shadow of God,”* a most appropriate designation for the craftsman who would construct the Tabernacle. Bezalel is identified as ***“son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.”*** Neither of the men chosen to carry out the construction of the Tabernacle and its furnishings are from the tribe of Levi. This unexpected turn of events may well be deliberate, as a way of affirming that the Tabernacle was God’s gift not merely to the priesthood but to the entire nation.

*“What is perhaps most significant about Bezalel’s family lineage is his being a Judahite. In all aspects of Tabernacle service and maintenance, Levites were the only persons allowed responsibility. They alone could set up, take down, transport, maintain, or utilize anything pertaining to the Tabernacle. But the original construction was another matter. The servants in God’s House were chosen for their duty by reason of birth lineage; but those who actually built it were chosen because of spiritual gifting. No Judahite would be able to touch anything in the Tabernacle once it was constructed and sanctified, but until then, the best craftsmen, regardless of tribe would handle every part of it as they made it into a beautiful, portable divine dwelling for Israel’s God.”*  
(Stuart, p. 650)





***“And I have filled him with the Spirit of God and with skill, ability, and knowledge”*** – The gifts which Bezalel received from the Lord were bestowed upon him by virtue of his having been ***“filled with the Spirit of God.”*** The manner or timing of the bestowal of the ***“Spirit of God”*** upon the chosen craftsman are not specified. Some, like the great medieval rabbi Maimonides, contended that this infilling had taken place at birth to enable Bezalel to take maximum advantage of every opportunity for learning and acquiring experience throughout his life up to this point. It is also possible, based upon the language of the text, to understand the coming of the Spirit as a sudden transformation which changed an ordinary man into a master craftsman instantaneously. Either would be equally miraculous. The same language is used to describe Joseph’s God-given ability to interpret dreams (Genesis 41:38) and to the inspiration of God’s spokesmen, the prophets (i.e. Numbers 24:2). In this instance it is most significant that the term ***“Spirit of God”***



***“And The Spirit Of God Moved Upon The Face of the Waters” by Tissot***

(Hebrew – *“ruach Elohim”*) is the same title which first occurred in Genesis 1:2. The parallel links the construction of the Tabernacle to the original creation and indicates that the restoration of the presence of God among His people through the Tabernacle is the restoration of the Creator’s original intent that the creature fashioned in His image was to live in God’s presence. The fact that this could only take place through the blood sacrifices which were held in the Tabernacle was a grim reminder of the price that would have to be paid by the Son of God in order to reconcile God and man once again.

The infilling of Bezalel by the Spirit of God simply provided him with everything that was necessary to carry out the responsibilities which God had entrusted to him. This Biblical understanding of the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit is in stark contrast to the charismatic fantasies which afflict the modern church. Douglas Stuart offers this cogent summary:

*“The concept of being filled with the Spirit of God is often misunderstood, and sometimes grossly so, as compared to its actual Biblical usage. Some have assumed that being filled with the Spirit must represent a powerful emotion experience that produces sensations and feelings that are otherworldly, with the result that the person filled receives an emotive impetus to enjoy life more richly, or experience living on a higher plane. Others have opined that being*

filled with the Spirit equates to a second specific work of grace in one's life, subsequent to and deeper than mere salvation/conversion, whereby God takes over more of one's life than would be possible if one were merely a forgiven believer. Yet other have concluded that speaking in tongues (by which they mean participating in paratactic vocalization, not associated with any earthly language) is the requisite sign of being filled with the Spirit, and that apart from speaking in tongues the filling of the Spirit does not occur...In fact, being 'filled with the Spirit' is a Biblical idiom for having from God the ability to do or say exactly what God wants done or said...Bezalel was simply a man aided by God's Spirit to do exactly what God wanted him to do, so the product of his craftsmanship was fully to God's high standards, essentially as if God had done it Himself” (Stuart, p. 652)



“Bezalel Building the Tabernacle”  
17<sup>th</sup> Century Luther Bible Woodcut  
by Christoph Weigel

The infilling of the Spirit of God enabled Bezalel in three specific areas: **“with skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts.”** Umberto Cassutto offers the following distinction between the three similar attributes: *“With wisdom - that is, expert knowledge of the techniques of workmanship and the ability to employ them: and with understanding that is, the capacity to deduce one thing from another and of solving any problem that may arise in the course of the work: and with knowledge - that is, the store of expertness that continues to grow relative to basic skill as the result of practical experience.”* (Cassutto, p. 402) As Dr. Cassutto’s attempted distinctions demonstrate, the meanings of these three terms are very closely related and it is difficult to define precise differences between them. William Propp more cautiously concludes: *“We really cannot differentiate among the Hebrew terms for learning, experience, skill, intuition, ingenuity, inspiration, genius etc. The point is that Bezalel possesses all of the requisite qualities in supernatural measure and will handily solve any structural problems not explicitly treated in his instructions.”* (Propp, p.

488) The text further stresses that these qualities will extend to every dimension of the craftsmanship needed to complete the Tabernacle – **“to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.”**

The Bible displays a significantly higher level of respect and appreciation for those who

work with their hands than contemporary society. In our highly technological society, with its distinctions between “*white collar*” and “*blue collar*” workers, manual labor is viewed with considerable disdain. However, when all labor is viewed as vocation from God to be carried out to the best of one's ability to His glory, the value of what a man does is not determined by the size of the paycheck received. The worker should take pride and satisfaction in his labor as a divine calling.

The Bible views the craftsman as one whom God has gifted with a unique and essential form of knowledge. When the prophet Isaiah foretold the devastation of the apostate nation of Judah and the exile of its most valuable citizens “*skilled craftsmen*” were prominently included among those upon whom the nation depended.

***“See now, the Lord, the Lord Almighty, is about to take from Jerusalem and from Judah both supply and support: all supplies of food and all supplies of water, the hero and the warrior, the judge and the prophet, the soothsayer and the elder, the captain of fifty and man of rank, the counselor, skilled craftsman, and clever enchanter.”*** (Isaiah 3:1 - 2; cf. 40:12 - 14)

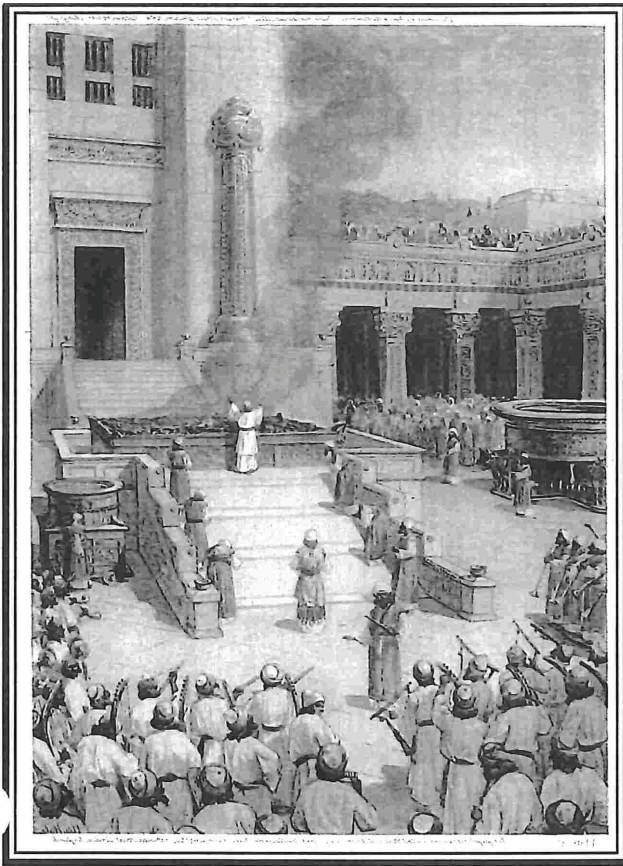


***“God The Creator” by Lucas Cranach***

The supreme, original craftsman is God Himself. The same three attributes which the Spirit of God bestowed upon Bezalel – “*wisdom,*” “*understanding,*” and “*knowledge*” are used to describe the manner in which God, the ultimate craftsman created the universe: “***By wisdom the Lord laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding He set the heavens in place; by His knowledge the deeps were divided and the clouds let drop the dew.***” (Proverbs 3:19 - 20) Later, in Proverbs 8, divine wisdom is identified as “*the craftsman at His side*” when God created the universe:

***“The Lord brought me forth as the first of His works, before His deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth; when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth; before He made the earth, or its fields, or any of the dust of the world. I was there when He set the heavens in place, when He marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above, and fixed securely the fountains of the deep,***

*when He gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep His command, and when He marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at His side.”* (Proverbs 8:22 - 30)



*“The Dedication Of Solomon's Temple” by  
Sir William Hole*

*“Wisdom,” “understanding,” and “knowledge”* recur together in the context of building in Proverbs 24:3 - 4 – *“By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; and through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.”* When in the distant future the time would come to replace the Tabernacle with the permanent shrine of the Temple in Jerusalem the skilled craftsman whom God provided to King Solomon was a Hebrew named Hiram the son of Abi who was living at the court of Hiram, the King of Tyre. Hiram, the Temple builder is described with the same language which had characterized Bezalel, the Tabernacle builder: *“King Solomon sent to Tyre and brought Hiram, whose mother was a widow from the tribe of Naphtali and whose father was a man of Tyre and a craftsman in bronze. Hiram was filled with the wisdom, the understanding, and the knowledge to do all work in bronze.”* ( 1 Kings 7:13 - 14) The parallel becomes all the more striking when we

observe that King Hiram’s response to Solomon uses the same words to describe Solomon himself:

*“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel who made the earth and heaven! He has given King David a wise son, endowed with knowledge and understanding - who will build a temple for the Lord and a palace for himself. I am sending you Hiram Abi, a man of great skill, whose mother was from Dan and whose mother was from Tyre. He is trained to work in gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, and with purple and blue and crimson yarn and fine linen. He is experienced in all kinds of engraving and can execute any design given to him.”* (2 Chronicles 2:12 - 14)

The consistent use of language carefully binds the Tabernacle to the Temple and both to the original creation which God crafted for man to live with Him.

*“To make artistic designs for work in gold, silver, and bronze, to cut and set stones, to*

*work in wood and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.*” - The text makes it clear that a wide variety of skills, many of them highly sophisticated would be needed to complete the Tabernacle and its elaborate furnishings. The summary listing here recognizes the broad scope of the challenge and assures Moses that God's empowerment of Bezalel will enable to cope with every dimension and detail of the work.

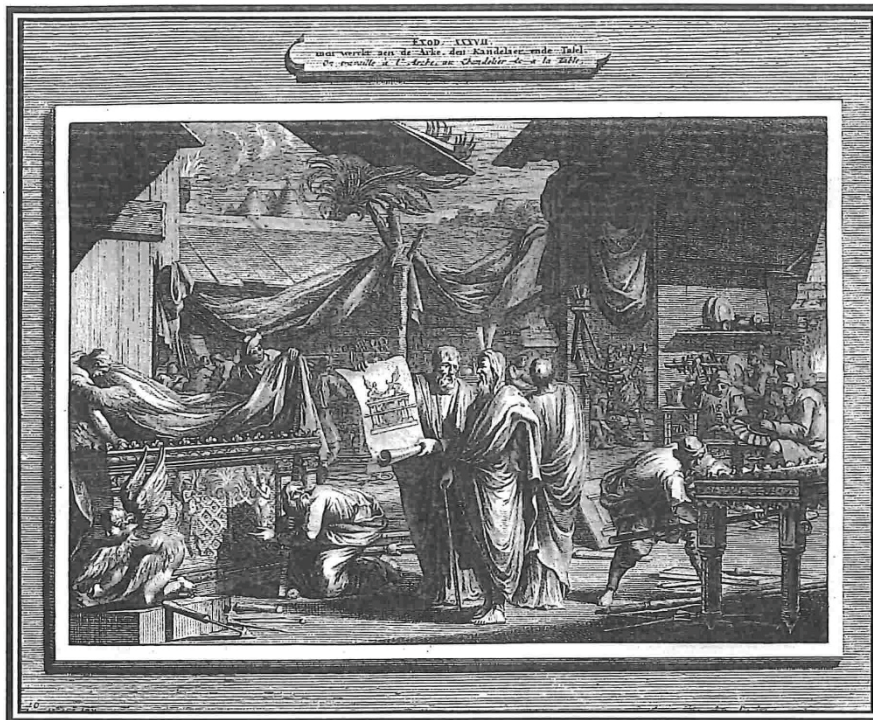


*Hebrew Engraving of Bezalel And Oholiab*

### **Verses 6 - 11**

*“Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab, son of Ahisamach, of the Tribe of Dan to help him. Also I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything that I have commanded you; the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Testimony with the Atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the Tent - the table and its articles, the pure gold lampstand and all its accessories, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the basin with its stand - and also the woven garments, both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests and the anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place. They are to make them just as I commanded you.”*

*“Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab...”* - The Lord further informs Moses that He has chosen another man to work closely with Bezalel and to assist him in supervising the skilled craftsmen of the Tabernacle. The Hebrew name **“Oholiab”** means *“the Father God is my tent.”* Once again, the name of God’s chosen is wonderfully appropriate for the task which God has entrusted to him. The verb **“I have appointed”** carries the same connotation of personal individual selection which was previously noted in regard to the choosing of Bezalel. The selection of the second construction supervisor from the tribe of Dan reinforces the message that these men represent the totality of the Israelite nation. Bezalel,



*“Bezael Reviewing The Design of the Ark With Moses”  
17<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving by Mattias Merian*

came from the southernmost tribe of Judah, and Oholiah came from the northernmost tribe of Dan. Also, Judah was the son of Jacob's primary wife, Leah and Dan was the first son of Rachel's servant girl Bilhah. The rabbis point out that the same diversity applied to the Temple of Solomon which was built by King Solomon of the tribe of Judah and Hiram of the tribe of Dan. God's endowment of special skills and abilities applied not only to Bezael and Oholiab but to all of the workman who labored in the construction of the Tabernacle – **“Also I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything that I have commanded you.”** *The Hebrew phrase literally reads – “In the mind of all who have wise minds I have put wisdom so they can make everything I have commanded you.”* The segment concludes with a summary listing of the structure, all of its furnishings, and the sacred vestments which were to woven for the high priest and the priesthood. The listing conforms to the information which had already been presented in the previous chapters. A stem reminder that everything was to be fashioned in precise conformity with God's design follows the summary.

### ***Verses 12 - 17***

***Then the Lord said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe My Sabbaths. This will be a sign between Me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord who makes you holy. Observe the Sabbath because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for generations to***

*come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between Me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.”*

*“Then the Lord said to Moses ...”* - As God’s work of creation took place over a period of seven days, culminating on the seventh day set aside as a Sabbath of rest, so also the instructions concerning the establishment of the Tabernacle, its furnishings, and its priesthood have been presented in a series of seven speeches (25:1 - 30:10; 30:11 - 16; 30:17 - 21; 30:22 - 33; 30:34 - 38; 31:1 - 11; 31:12 - 17). The seventh of those seven speeches commences here and like the seventh day of creation this seventh speech pertains to the observance of the Sabbath. When the Tabernacle narrative resumes in Chapter 35, after the interpolation of Golden Calf episode, it will commence with another repetition of the Sabbath command (35:1 - 3). This carefully structured literary parallel is designed to teach us the profound significance of the Tabernacle as a repetition and a restoration of God’s original creation.

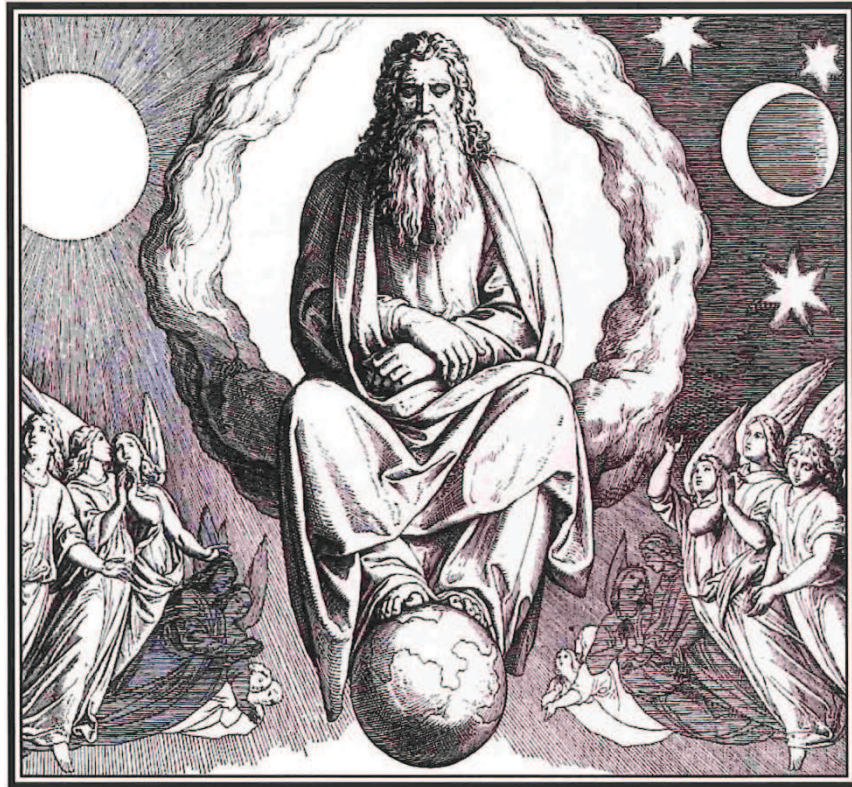
*‘Because we read the Bible forward, first Genesis and then Exodus, we naturally perceive the Tabernacle as recapitulating Creation. The reverse is equally true, perhaps even truer: Creation anticipates the Tabernacle. Thus, the Talmud notes – ‘On the day that Moses completed erecting the Tabernacle, the world was erected along with it...Before the Tabernacle was erected, the world wobbled; from the instant that the Tabernacle was erected, the world was made firm.’”(Propp, p. 676)*

As noted above (cf. Notes. p. 1315) , the Tabernacle facilitates the restoration of creation’s original purpose as the place where the loving God may dwell among mankind, the creatures fashioned in His own image. The blood sacrifices and rituals of the Tabernacle serve as the poignant prototype and constant reminder of the once for all sacrifice which must be made by the Son of God upon the cross to restore righteousness to sinful man and make man’s presence before the holy God possible. The Tabernacle and everything about it point directly to and are perfectly fulfilled by Jesus Christ. These themes are explicitly reasserted by the Evangelist St. John in the opening paragraphs of his Gospel as he carefully combines the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Word of God by whom all things were made in the beginning (John 1 : 1 - 3 Creation) with the



*“On The Seventh Day God Rested”*

language of the Tabernacle: *“The Word became flesh and dwelt (literally – “tabernacle”) among us and we beheld His glory (the “shekinah” pillar of cloud and fire which rested upon the Tabernacle), as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14)



*“The Original Sabbath Day” by Carolsfeld*

In the most practical sense, the repetition of the Sabbath command here is intended to eliminate any uncertainty as to whether the craftsmen of the Tabernacle would be allowed to work seven days a week. The importance and urgency of the task might have suggested that Tabernacle construction could be exempt from the prohibition of work on the seventh day. However (*“nevertheless”*) the command to build the Tabernacle does not supercede the command to observe the Sabbath. Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, one of the foremost teachers of modern Hebrew orthodoxy, offered this interpolated translation and commentary on these words from God to Moses. The rabbi, reflecting the traditional view of orthodoxy, believed that these instructions were given to Moses following the episode with the Golden Calf, and that the urgency of the people to complete the Tabernacle was, to a great extent, motivated by their desire to atone for their apostasy:

*“Now, because I am telling you to convey these teachings in an exceptional manner, you might think that working on the Tabernacle is so important that it overrides the prohibition of working on the Sabbath. Therefore, **Speak to the Israelites** in the same exception public forum in which you deliver the instructions for the Tabernacle **and say to them:** Anxious as you may be to complete the Tabernacle - inasmuch as it expresses how God has forgiven you*



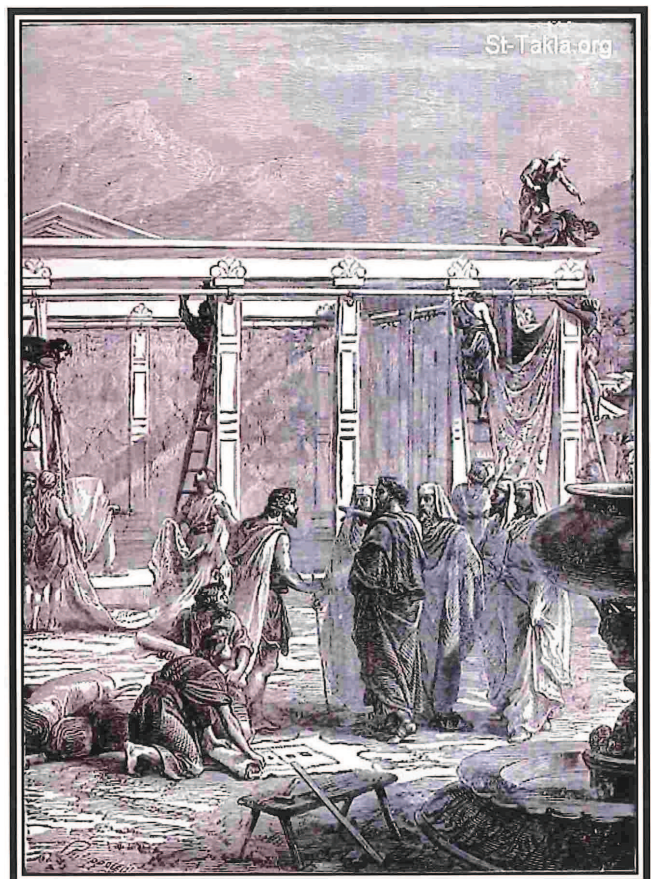
*the sin of the golden calf - you shall nevertheless observe My Sabbaths carefully, and not let your enthusiasm for building the Tabernacle lead you to inadvertently desecrate the Sabbath. For the Sabbath is a sign for all the other nations of the special relationship, between Me and you throughout your generations., in that I have designated as your day of rest the same day of the week on which I rested when I created the world. In this way, the other nations are to know that it is none other than I, God, who sanctifies you.”* (Schneerson, p. 246)

However, the broad scope of the commandment and its emphasis upon the Sabbath as a permanent component of the covenant between God and Israel clearly indicates that this is more than a simple clarification in regard to the construction of the Tabernacle. Both the Tabernacle and the Sabbath pertain directly to the worship of Israel.

*“They are intended as a conclusion to the whole series of instructions concerning the media of worship, a conclusion designed to call attention to the importance of stopping to reflect on the reality of the presence of Yahweh, of providing a regular time for honoring that presence in worship.”* (Durham, p. 412)

Moreover, the Sabbath command plays a particularly prominent role in the specification of the covenant and, accordingly, in the religious life of the nation of Israel. Along with the Kosher dietary laws, the observance of the Sabbath becomes the defining demonstration of God's covenant with Israel. Noting this prominence, Dr. John Currid identifies this paragraph as *“the Sabbath Crescendo”* to the instructions for the Tabernacle:

*“The final note regarding the building of the Tabernacle and the laws of the priesthood is a command relating to the Sabbath. As Matthew Henry points out, the reason it all ends here is ‘because the observance of the Sabbath is indeed the hem and the hedge of the whole law.’... Of all the commandments of the Decalogue, none is dealt with more frequently in the Old Testament than the Sabbath ordinance. This underscores the importance of the commandment of God.”* (Currid, II, p. 267)



*“Bezael and Oholiab Supervising The Construction of the Tabernacle” - Luther Bible Engraving*



*“Sabbath Worship In The Synagogue”*

The content of the Sabbath command here parallels its original statement in the Third Commandment (Exodus 20:8 - 11). Both texts set apart the seventh day as a day of rest based upon the pattern of the seven days of the creation week. The additional emphasis in this instance is the explicit role of the Sabbath Day as ***“a sign between me and you for generations to come, so that you may know that I am the Lord who makes you holy...It will be a sign between Me and the Israelites forever”*** and the concomitant severity of the punishment for those who violate the sanctity of the Sabbath – ***“Whoever does any work on the Sabbath Day must be put to death.”*** The text here is also repetitive, verses 16 - 17 repeating the previous statements of verses 13 – 14. The repetition within the text, like the repetition between the texts, is evidently intended to stress the importance of the Sabbath commandment with the covenant.

The observance of the Sabbath rest is intended by God to be ***“a sign between Me and you.”*** By keeping the Sabbath Israel acknowledges God as their Creator who rested on the seventh day. At the same time it will be a constant reminder that their identity as the chosen people is not an inherent right or a personal entitlement. Rather, it is the result of the covenant relationship which God initiated and established with them by grace. The Sabbath was a sign woven into the routine of their everyday lives, so that it might remind them week after week and across the generations to come of who they were and how they had come to be the chosen people of God. God's words of grace are unmistakably clear – ***“So that you may***

***know that I am the Lord who makes you holy.***” Israel’s holiness before God was neither a birthright nor a privilege earned by superior moral conduct. It was a gift, unearned and unearnable, only to be received by God’s wondrous grace.

*“Keeping the Sabbath is set forth here with the broad significance of a general sign, throughout Israel’s generations, that Yahweh is the One who has made them special. Keeping His Sabbath is one way of realizing that specialness, of keeping keen the sense of it, just as the Tabernacle and the Presence at hand had made that specialness a reality. The intention of this sign and the reason it must be kept so regularly and so conscientiously is that Israel might know Yahweh’s presence by experience, in every generation, and be reminded constantly that only by the Presence are they a people set apart. It is for this reason that the Sabbath is to be kept so strictly. Disregard for the Sabbath either by neglect or by violation concerning it, is disregard for Yahweh, and disregard for Yahweh is disregard for the reason and the possibility of Israel’s existence as a people.”* (Durham, p. 413)



***“Studying the Torah On The Sabbath”***

***“Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death.”*** - The text uses a particularly strong verb ***“desecrates”*** - to describe those who fail to honor and observe the Sabbath commandment. ***“Desecrate”*** is the opposite of ***“consecrate.”*** It means to violate, pollute, or profane a place, object, or time which is sacred, that is, which has been set apart for the particular use or worship of God. It carries the connotation of deliberate action intended to reject, spurn, and dishonor God. - to violate or outrage the sacred character of a place, object, or time by destructive, violent, or sacrilegious action. Desecration may involve the physical or moral corruption or contamination of that which has been set apart to the Lord and holy and

pure. and holy and pure. It is a uniquely intense term designed to cause the pious to recoil in horror and disgust. This term becomes the typical label for Sabbath breakers throughout the Old Testament and is consistently linked to God's condemnation of apostate Israel and their rejection of His covenant. ***"Blessed is the man who does this, who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil."*** (Isaiah 56:2)

***"Yet My people rebelled against Me in the desert. They did not follow My decrees but rejected My laws - although the man who obeys them will live by them - and they utterly desecrated My Sabbaths ... because they rejected My laws and rejected My decrees, and desecrated My Sabbaths. For their hearts were devoted to their idols. I am the Lord your God; follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. Keep My Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God. But the children rebelled against Me ... and they desecrated My Sabbaths ... because they had not obeyed My laws and rejected My decrees and desecrated My Sabbaths, and their eyes lusted after their fathers' idols. "*** (Ezekiel 20:13, 16, 21, 24)

***"You have despised My holy things and desecrated My Sabbaths ... And you have forgotten Me, declares the Lord ... They have also done this to Me: at the same time they defiled My Sanctuary and desecrated My Sabbaths. On the very day they sacrificed their children to the idols, they entered My sanctuary and desecrated it. That is what they did in My House."*** (Ezekiel 22:8; 23:38 - 39)

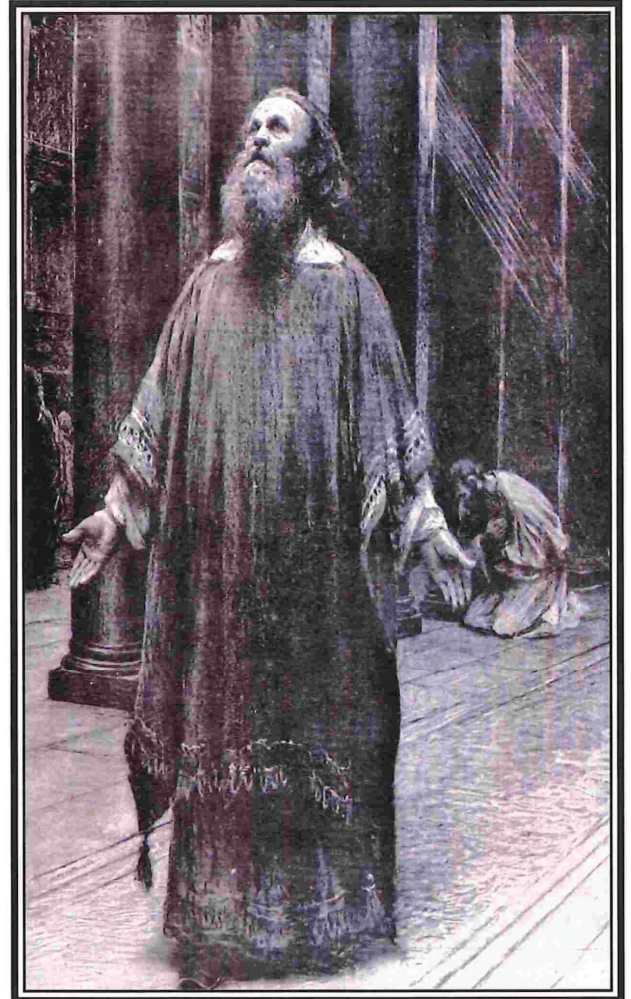


***"Keeping The Sabbath" by Hitzsenberger***

***“I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, ‘What is this wicked thing you are doing - desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn’t your forefathers do the same thing so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city/ Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath.”*** (Nehemiah 13:17 - 18)

The severity of the punishment for desecration of the Sabbath further emphasizes the severity of the offense: ***“whoever desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people.”*** The ultimate penalty, elimination from the nation of Israel by execution, is to be applied. Numbers 15:32 - 36 indicated that the method of execution was stoning outside of the camp.

The Sabbath command is to be ***“a sign between Me and you for the generations to come”*** – ***“celebrating it for generations to come as a lasting covenant.”*** The observance of the Sabbath was to be a core component of the covenant between God and the nation of Israel. It was to remain in effect throughout the entire period of God’s covenant with Israel. Sadly, as the centuries passed, the worship of Israel generally, and the observance of the Sabbath particularly, had degenerated into empty hypocritical formalism. The Lord denounced this hypocrisy through His prophet Isaiah, labeling Jerusalem as a new Sodom and Gomorrah, on the eve of the Babylonian captivity:



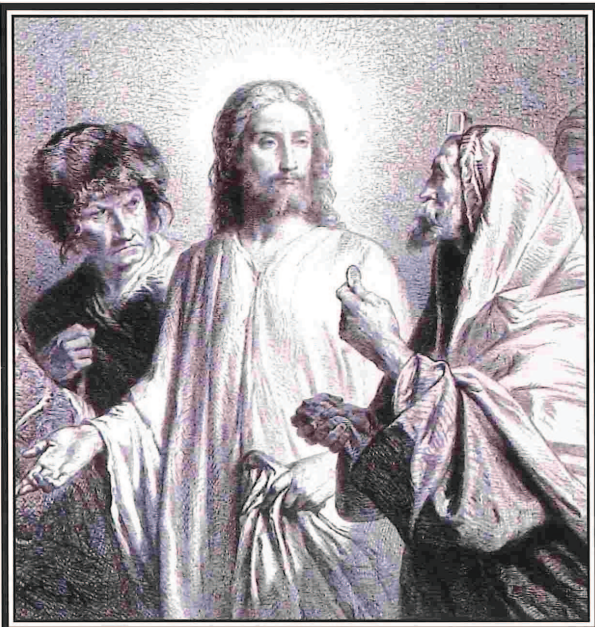
***“The Prayer of the Pharisee In the Temple” by Eugene Burnand***

***“Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! The multitude of your sacrifices - what are they to Me, says the Lord. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and of the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and rams and goats. When you come to appear before Me, who asked this of you, this trampling of My courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings - your incense is detestable to Me. New moons, Sabbaths, and convocations - I cannot bear your evil assemblies. For your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts My soul hates. They have become a burden to Me and I am weary of bearing them.”*** (Isaiah 1:10 - 14)

By the time of Christ, the Sabbath observance had degenerated into a massive burden of legalistic rules and regulations which the Lord spurned as a malicious distortion of God's intent. When the Pharisees challenged His authority to question their rules Christ responded: ***"I tell you that One greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy not sacrifice' you would not have condemned the innocent, for the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."*** (Matthew 12:6 - 8) ***"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."*** (Mark 2:27) In response to conflicts erupting within Christian congregations made up of both Jews and Gentiles, the apostles made it very clear that the observance of the Sabbath was a part of the ceremonial law of the old covenant which had been perfectly fulfilled in Christ. The Hebrew Sabbath pointed forward toward the eternal rest which God would provide for His people in Christ.

***"God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us; He took it away, nailing it to the cross ... Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is in Christ."*** (Colossians 2:13 - 16)

***"Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it ... Now we who have believed enter that rest just as God has said ... Yet His work has been***



***"The Pharisees Challenging Jesus" by Eugene Burnand***

***finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere He has spoken about the seventh day in these words; 'And on the seventh day God rested from His work.' and again in the passage above He says, 'They shall never enter My rest.' It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those that formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in because of their disobedience ... Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter the rest, so that no one will fall by following the example of their disobedience."***

(Hebrews 4:1 - 11)

That being the case, the entire issue of the Sabbath falls within the area of Christian freedom, where every believer may do that which is most beneficial to their own spiritual

lives. However, in the specific historical context of Jewish/Gentile congregations, and the heritage of the Sabbath as the definitive practice of Judaism, the temptation to impose the traditional practice upon the Gentiles as a divine requirement would be very difficult to resist. Paul was also very sensitive to the likelihood that continued Sabbath observance would become an easy avenue for Satan to tempt Jewish Christians to relapse from grace to self-righteous legalism.

***“One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers everyday alike. Each should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, does so to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God.; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die we belong to the Lord.” Christian Churches*** (Romans 14:5 - 8) Christian liberty was a particular problem in

Galatia. There the propensity of many in the congregation to continue to observe the regulations of the Sabbath and to require that observance of other led the apostle to lament: ***“You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you!”*** (Galatians 4:10) Under these circumstances it is not difficult to understand why by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, Sunday, the day of Christ’s resurrection, had become the typical worship day for Christians. In Acts 20, St. Paul reports: ***“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people, and because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.”*** (Acts 20:7) That practice is also reflected in the introduction to St. John’s Revelation: ***“I John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom, and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice.”*** (Revelation 1:9 - 10)

As the fathers of the early church sought to clarify that Christianity was not merely a sect within Judaism, Sabbath observance remained a fundamental concern. Ignatius (30 - 107 A.D.), a disciple of St. John, wrote these blunt words to the congregation in Magnesia:

*“Let us, therefore, no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner, and rejoice in days of idleness...But let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a*



***“Peter and Paul Debating The Role of The Ceremonial Laws of Israel In The Christian Churches”***



*“The Martyrdom of St. Ignatius”*

*spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the Law, not in the relaxation of the body, admiring the workmanship of God, and not eating things prepared the day before nor using lukewarm drinks, and walking within a prescribed space, nor finding delight in dancing nor plaudits that have no sense in them. And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s Day as a festival, the Resurrection Day, the queen and chief of all the days of the week...It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism that has now come to an end. For where there is Christianity there cannot be Judaism.” (ANF ,I, p. 62 - 63)*

The Epistle of Barnabas, written by a Jewish Christian leader in Alexandria around A.D. 100, affirms that the Sabbath ordinance was fulfilled by the true rest which Christ has won for His people and would be experienced in heaven, and that

the worship of the Christian Church now takes place on Sunday to celebrate the Lord:

*“Further, also, it is written also concerning the Sabbath in the Decalogue, which the Lord spoke face to face to Moses on Mount Sinai, ‘And sanctify ye the Lord’s Sabbath with clean hands and a pure heart...Behold, therefore; certainly one properly resting sanctifies it, when we ourselves, having received the promise, wickedness no longer existing and all things having been made new by the Lord shall be able to work righteousness. Then we shall be able to sanctify it, having first sanctified ourselves. Further He says to them, ‘Your new moons and your Sabbaths I cannot endure.’...Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead. And when He had manifested Himself, he ascended into the heavens.” (ANF ,I, p. 147)*

The Epistle to Diognetus, also written at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, by a Christian disciple who claims to have studied under the apostles, is the earliest example of Christian apologetics, that is, defending Christianity in comparison to the teachings of other religions. In the segment on Judaism, the letter condemns Sabbath observance as an example of the legalism and work righteousness which characterizes the Judaism of the rabbis:



*“But as to their meticulousness concerning foods, their superstition regarding the Sabbaths, their boasting about circumcision, and their fancies about fasting and new moons - which are utterly ridiculous and unworthy of notice I do not think you need to learn anything from me. For to speak falsely of God, as if He had forbidden us to do what is good on Sabbath days, how is not this impious?...And as to their observing months and days - as if waiting on the moon and stars - and their distributing according to their own tendencies the appointments of God and the vicissitudes of the seasons, some for festivities and others for mourning; who could deem this a part of divine worship and not much rather a manifestation of folly?”*

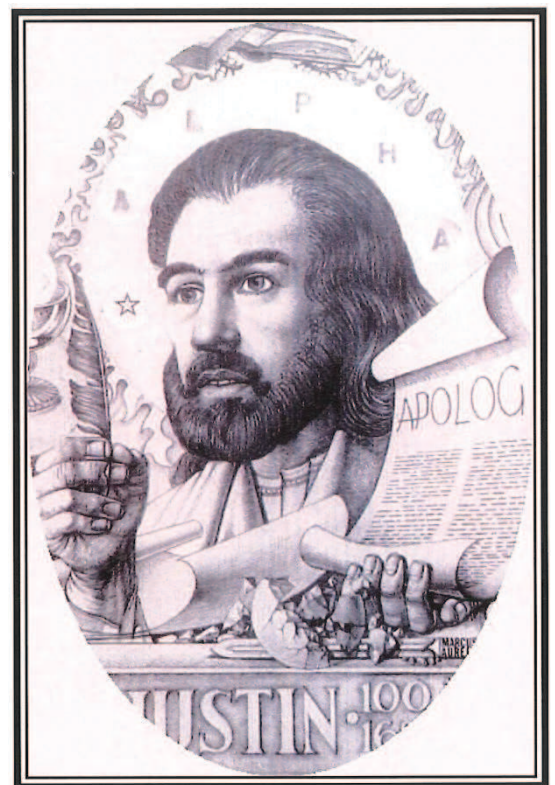
Justin Martyr, writing around A.D. 150, noted and explained the practice of Christianity as to a day for worship in this way:

*“And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place...Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly because it is the first day, on which God, having wrought a change in darkness and matter, made the world. On the same day, Jesus Christ, our Savior, rose from the dead.”* (ANF, I, p. 186)

In a subsequent *“Dialog With Trypho, A Jew”* Justin replied to the accusation that Christians had abandoned God’s Law by their failure to practice circumcision and observe the Sabbath with the assertion Christians celebrated the fulfillment of the Sabbath by living in accordance with the will of God every day:

*“The new law requires you to keep perpetual Sabbath. You Jews, because you are idle for one day, suppose you are godly, not understanding why this command was given to you. If you eat unleavened bread, you say the will of God has been fulfilled. The Lord our God does not take pleasure in such observances. If there is any perjured person or thief among you, let him cease to be so. If any adulterer, let him repent. Then he has kept the sweet and true Sabbaths of God.”* (ANF, I, p. 200)

The Council of Laodicea, which met in the Greek city of that name in A.D. 364 (one of the seven cities of Asia Minor to which the Book of Revelation was addressed) issued a



***Justin Martyr – Defender of the Faith***



*“Saint Augustine”  
by Antonio De Messina*

forthright decree against “*Judaisers*” who required continued Sabbath observance as a part of Christianity: “*Christians ought not to Judaize and to rest on the Sabbath, but to work on that day; but preferring the Lord's Day, should rest on that day as Christians. Wherefore, if they should be found to Judaize, let them be accursed from Christ.*” (Riggle, p. 127)

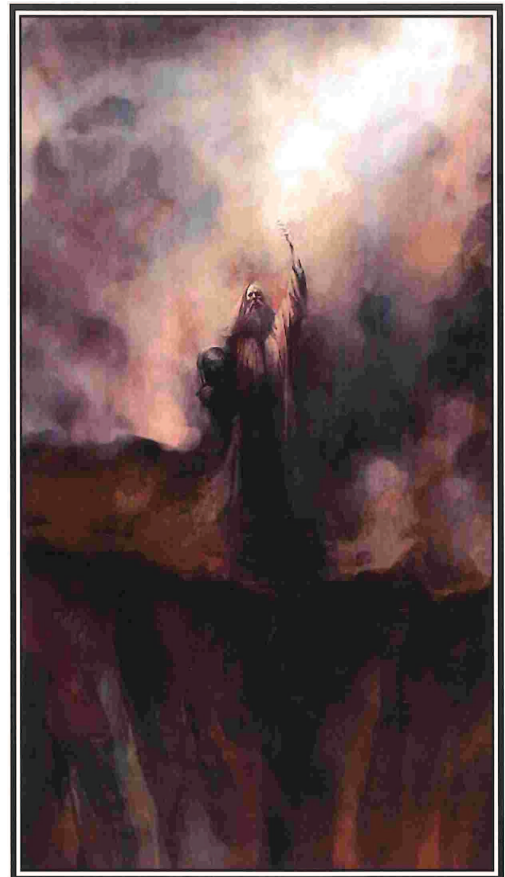
St. Augustine, the Bishop of the North African city Of Hippo, was perhaps the single most influential theologian of the early church. In A.D. 400, Augustine responded by letter to a series of questions about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments from one of his parishioners. One of those inquiries regarded the observance of the Sabbath. He noted that everything in the Old Testament prefigured the coming Messiah and was designed to prepare the way for Him and to be fulfilled by him. Augustine's reply is a classic statement of historic Christendom's position on the Sabbath and its fulfillment in Christ:

*“In the Sabbath, a figure is presented of the spiritual rest of which it is said in the Psalm: **“Be still, and know that I am God,”** and unto which men are invited by the Lord Himself in the words: **“Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart; so shall ye find rest unto your souls.”** ... We are not commanded to observe the day of the Sabbath literally, in resting from bodily labor as it is observed by the Jews; and even their observance of the rest as prescribed, is to be deemed worthy of contempt, except as signifying another, namely, spiritual rest. From this we may reasonably conclude that all those things which are figuratively set forth in Scripture are powerful in stimulating that love by which we tend towards rest; since the only figurative or typical precept in the Decalogue is the one in which the rest is commended to us, which is desired everywhere, but is to be found, sure and sacred in God alone. The Lord's Day, however, has been made known not to the Jews, but to the Christians by the resurrection of the Lord, and from Him it began to have the festive character which is proper to it...Before the resurrection of the Lord it was reserved and hidden and there was not any instance of the resurrection of One, who, rising from the dead was no more to die, and over whom death should no longer have dominion; this *“In the Sabbath, a figure is presented of the spiritual rest of which it is**

*but is to be found, sure and sacred in God alone. The Lord's Day, however, Christians by the resurrection of the Lord, and from Him it began to have the festive character which is proper to it...Before the resurrection of the Lord it was reserved and hidden and there was not any instance of the resurrection of One, who, rising from the dead was no more to die, and over whom death should no longer have dominion; this being done in order that from the time when such a resurrection did take place in the Lord's own body (the Head of the Church being the first to experience that which His body the Church expects at the end of time), the day upon which He rose, the eighth day namely (which is the same with the first of the week) should begin to be observed as the Lord's day."*

At the heart of the debate over the role of the Sabbath is confusion over the more basic issue of the relationship between Christianity and the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were given to Moses upon Mount Sinai as part of God's covenant with the nation of Israel. That covenant, including the Ten Commandments, does not apply to Christians. This is clear in the Biblical texts cited above in specific reference to the Sabbath. Martin Luther is characteristically unequivocal on this important issue. In a 1525 sermon entitled "*How Christians Should Regard Moses*," the reformer emphasized the importance of context and consistency in dealing with Scripture:

*"The Mosaic Law does not bind pagans, but only the Jews...Moses was an intermediary solely to the Jewish people to whom God gave the law. Moses does not concern us. If I accept Moses in one commandment, I must accept all of Moses. Thus, it would follow, that if I accept Moses as a master then I must let myself be circumcised according to the Jewish custom, eat, drink and dress thus and so, and the observance of all that stuff... Now, if anyone confronts you with Moses and all his commandments and you want to press you to keep them, say 'Go to the Jews with your Moses; I am no Jew. Don't entangle me with your Moses... Therefor, let Moses be the national law of the Jews and leave is pagans unconfused by it...But let God's Word be what it may, I must know and pay attention to who God's Word is addressed...One should not see whether it is God's Word – whether God has said it, but rather one must see to whom it is said and whether it applies to you...Moses is dead...Not one iota of Moses concerns us...God has not lead us Germans out of Egypt."* (Bornkamm, p. 121 ff)



*"Moses Receiving The Two Tablets Of The Law Fashioned*

Nonetheless, despite the fact that the law of Sinai is completely irrelevant to the Christian, Luther used the Ten Commandments prominently in his catechisms. He did so not because they were given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, but because they provide a helpful summary of the natural law, written in man's heart, which applies to every human being. That revealed, written summary is of critical importance because man's sinful nature has severely diminished human awareness of natural law and distorted human reason in opposition to the truth of God. If the knowledge of good and evil which God created as a core component of man's original divine image is to be restored, that restoration must come about at God's initiative and by God's power through the proclamation of His Law from His Word. Thus, the repeated external proclamation of the law, which had once been a natural part of man, has been necessary since the corruption of man's nature in the Fall. First to Adam and Eve, then to Noah, then to Abraham and the patriarchs, then Israel at Sinai - God revealed that which sin had concealed, so that man might know the will of God, recognize the depth of his dilemma and realize that his only hope for deliverance from the curse of sin was the undeserved love of God in the promise of the Messiah. German theologian Albrecht Peters offers this grim but accurate description of sinful man's relentless suppression of the law written upon his heart.



*Dr. Martin Luther by Lucas Cranach*

*“Man’s knowledge of good and evil, let alone of God and of His commandments, is by no means a bright sentence of God engraved in hearts once and for all that automatically lights up when transgressed. This knowledge is neither a permanent possession of reason nor an enduring faculty of conscience. Rather, man tirelessly seeks to silence that call to conscience and to blur this original sentence. In this he is supported by the satanic forces of opposition (‘the devil, the world and my own sinful flesh’) that ‘blinds and possesses hearts so much that they do not always feel such law.’ The fact that man hears God’s call in his conscience as a convicting force is something that he is unable to produce at will from his own reason or power. Rather, he experiences this event from the outside.’ It is not man who calls out to himself in conscience, but he is reached and confronted by God’s call in the Law.” (Peters, p. 77)*

In each of those instances, when sinful man “*is reached and confronted by God’s call in the Law,*” the disclosure of God’s Law was addressed to particular individuals within a specific set of circumstances. This is especially true in regard to the Ten Commandments because of their central role in the unique national covenant with the Children of Israel. Luther recognized that even within the Ten Commandments, in those instances where Moses is instructed to make specific applications of the natural law to the Israelite nation, those applications applied only to Israel. The Reformer explains: “*Therefore, wherever Moses’ law and nature’s law are one and the same, there the law remains and is not abrogated externally... We want to regard Moses as a teacher, but not as a lawgiver unless he agrees with the New Testament and with the natural law.*” (Peters, p. 76) Dr. Richard Bauckham, author of *The Sabbath/Sunday Question In The Protestant Tradition*, defines Luther’s careful distinction as follows:

*“The Decalogue as the law of Moses was binding only on the Jews. The Decalogue as natural law is binding on all men. ‘We do not read Moses because he concerns us - because we have to obey him - but because he agrees with the law of nature and has expressed this law better than any heathen ever could. The Ten Commandments are thus a mirror of our life in which we see what we lack.’ The Decalogue comes to us with the force of the law of God because it enshrines in an especially clear manner the law written in our hearts. But it does so only insofar as it agrees with natural law... Luther distinguished, as abrogated by Christ, ‘ceremonial’ aspects within the Decalogue. Therefore, ‘Moses legislation about images and the Sabbath, and what else goes beyond natural law, since it is not supported by natural law, is specifically free, null and void, and is specifically given to the Jewish people alone.’ Of course, Luther cannot attempt to distinguish the ‘ceremonial’ and ‘moral’ aspects within the Decalogue by reference to an extra - Scriptural standard of natural law. His standard for such distinction is, in fact, the New Testament.” (Carson, p. 313)*



*“Remember The Sabbath Day” by Broughton*

It is critically important to note that the standard which enables us to distinguish between the universal natural law and the specific applications of that law to the nation of Israel within the Ten Commandments is not merely a matter of human opinion. That distinction must be defined by the Word of God itself in the New Testament.

As previously observed, the New Testament repeatedly addresses the question of Sabbath observance due to the painful struggle over this issue in the congregations of the early church and affirms that Israel’s Saturday Sabbath rest is now obsolete, having been perfectly fulfilled in the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ for every believer. Luther argues:

*“The setting apart of the Sabbath day by God, and thereby the concrete wording of this Old Testament commandment is given to the Jews alone. It is thus only a temporary addition and adornment, given only to this people led out of Egypt, which also was not meant to remain forever, as little as the entire Law of Moses. In this sense, the Third Commandment does not bind us. By Christ it has been taken away from the hearts and consciences of believers and has been abrogated in its external law - like form.” (Peters, p. 179)*

The Third Commandment is certainly relevant to all men everywhere beyond its particular application to the nation of Israel. The core of natural law upon which the Sabbath command to Israel was based is the need of every human being to worship God and be sustained and strengthened spiritually in Word and sacrament.



*“Remember The Sabbath Day”*

*“For if God had never established the law through Moses, the natural human mind will still have this notion to worship God and esteem Him highly.”* (Bornkamm, p. 128) Worship and the Word remain *“the true, genuine and sole meaning of this commandment”* for all men everywhere. Luther explained this Biblical perspective in response to Anabaptist radicals who sought to re - impose the Sabbath law on Christians:

*“Similarly, the third commandment concerning the Sabbath, of which the Jews make so much, is per se a commandment that applies to the whole world; but the form in which Moses frames it and adapts it to his people was imposed only on the Jews, just as with regard to the first commandment none but the Jews must believe and confess that the common God of all the world let them out of Egypt. For the true meaning of the commandment is that we on that day should teach and hear the Word of God, thereby sanctifying both the day and ourselves. And in accord with this, ever after to the present day, Moses and the prophets are read and preached on the Sabbath Day among the Jews. Whenever God’s Word is preached, it follows naturally that one must necessarily celebrate at the same hour or time and be quiet, and without any other preoccupation only speak and hear what God declares, what He teaches us and tells us...Moses’ mention of the seventh day, and how God created the world in six days, which is why we are to do no work - all this is a temporal adaptation with which Moses suits this commandment to his people especially at that time...This is a temporary addendum and adaptation intended solely for this people which was brought out of Egypt. Nor was it to endure forever any more than was the whole Law of Moses. But the sanctifying, that is, the teaching and preaching of God’s Word, which is the true, genuine and sole meaning of this commandment has been from the beginning and pertains to all the world forever.”* (LW, 47, pp. 92 - 93)

This was significantly more important than the selection of a particular day. Any attempt to impose the Sabbath of Moses upon the people of Christ as divine law was to be spumed and rejected as an infringement upon Christian liberty: *“If anywhere the day is made holy for the mere day’s sake - if anywhere anyone sets up its observance on a Jewish foundation, then I order you to work on it, to ride on it, to dance on it, to feast on it, to do anything on it that shall remove this encroachment on Christian liberty.”* (Carson, p. 314)

The Augsburg Confession, the official statement of Lutheran beliefs presented to Emperor Charles V in 1530, reflected the same position, noted that the selection of Sunday, the Lord's Day, was a matter of convenience within Christian liberty, rather than a necessity in obedience to divine command:



*“Moses With the Tablets of the Law”*

*“For they that think that the observance of the Lord’s Day was appointed by the Church, instead of the Sabbath, are greatly deceived. The Scripture which teacheth that all the Mosaic ceremonies can be omitted after the Gospel was revealed, has abrogated the Sabbath. And yet, because it was requisite to appoint a certain day so that people might know when they might come together, it appears that the Church did, for that purpose appoint the Lord’s Day, which for this cause also seemed to have been pleasing, that men might have an example of Christian liberty and might know that the observation of the Sabbath, nor of another day was of necessity.”* (Carson, p. 314)

### **Verse 18**

*When the Lord finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.*

*“When the Lord finished speaking ...”* - When Moses had originally been invited to meet with the Lord upon the crest of Sinai, God had indicated that the purpose for the encounter was to receive these engraved stone tablets: *“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I have written for their instruction.’* (Exodus 24:12)

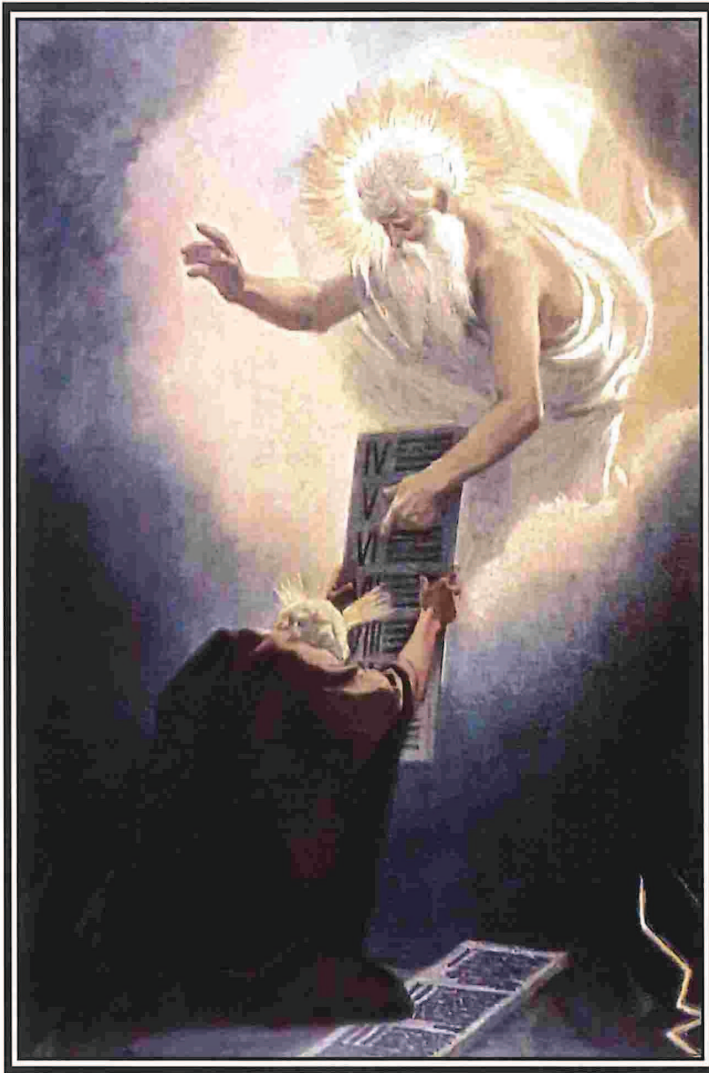




*“Moses Descending From Sinai With The Two Tablets Inscribed By The Finger Of God”  
by Arthur Szyk*

The disclosure of this divine intent set the stage for the entire prolonged encounter between the Lord and the prophet and identified the presentation which would be the culmination of the revelation of God’s Law for the nation of Israel. This prior indication is signaled here by the use of the definite article *“the tablets of stone”* which identifies them as specific objects of which Moses was already aware. In contrast to these two stone tablets, the great majority of that which God revealed to Moses upon the mountain was written down by the prophet himself presumably upon parchment scrolls. In Hebrew tradition the rabbis taught that a total of 613 individual laws were given to Moses upon the mountain. These distinctions are carefully designed to express the unique importance of the Ten Commandments as the foremost of the host of God’s laws to Israel and the basic foundation of the covenant which He was establishing with their nation. The rabbis further argued that every other law or regulation which God established could ultimately be traced back to one of the Ten Words.

*“Not only does the present verse bring to a conclusion one more segment of the Mount Sinai legal revelation, but it also further endorses the Ten Words/Commandments as the premier legal formulation for Israel. All other laws are important and not to be ignored, but the Ten Words are so foundational, so principal that they have a status and personal divine endorsement all their own.” (Stuart, p. 656)*



*“Moses Receiving The Two Tablets Inscribed By The Finger Of God Upon Sinai” by Gebhard Fugel*

*“The two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone” had been fashioned by God Himself. Exodus 32:16 indicates – “The tablets were the work of God.” Talmudic tradition teaches that the two tablets were prepared by God at the time of creation. Louis Ginzberg’s classic study - The Legends of the Jews (1911) - summed up the traditions as follows: “Moses departed from the heavens with the two tables on which the Ten Commandments were engraved, and just as the words on it are by nature Divine, so too are the tablets on which they are engraved. These were created by God’s own hand in the dusk of the first Sabbath, at the close of the creation, and were made of sapphire like-stone. On each of the tablets are the Ten Commandments, four times repeated, and in such wise were they engraved that the letters were legible on both sides, for like the tablets, the writing and the pencils for inscription too, were of heavenly origin. Between the separate commandments were noted down all the precepts of the Torah in all their particulars, although the tablets were not more than six hands in length and as much in width. It is another of the attributes of the tables*

*that although they are fashioned out of the hardest stone, they can still be rolled up like a scroll.”* (Ginzberg, III, p. 119) The blue sapphire stone was representative of the heavenly throne of God. (Cf. Exodus 24:9 - 10; Ezekiel 1:25 - 28; 10:1; 28:13). The rabbis further taught that when the text of Exodus indicates that the tablets were written on both sides, the intended meaning is that each of the letters were bored completely through the stone and that those letters which would then have been disconnected from the surrounding surface floated miraculously in place. Furthermore, the text appeared in its ordinary legible orientation on both sides of that tablet, which could not naturally have been the case.

The fact that there were two tablets was not necessitated by the amount of writing they were to bear. The Hebrew text of the Decalogue includes only 127 words which could easily have been accommodated on a single tablet. Subsequent descriptions further indicate that each of the tablets was inscribed on both sides (cf. Exodus 32:15) Nor did each of the

two tablets include five of the commands as is commonly depicted in traditional art. Instead, the creation of two tablets reflects the common practice of the ancient Near East for the ratification of a treaty covenant, particularly a “*suzerainty treaty*” which was an agreement between an overlord and those who were agreeing to serve him. Two identical copies of the agreement were prepared, one for each of the parties to the treaty. That was the case here, providing one copy for the vassal, Israel, and another for the sovereign, God.

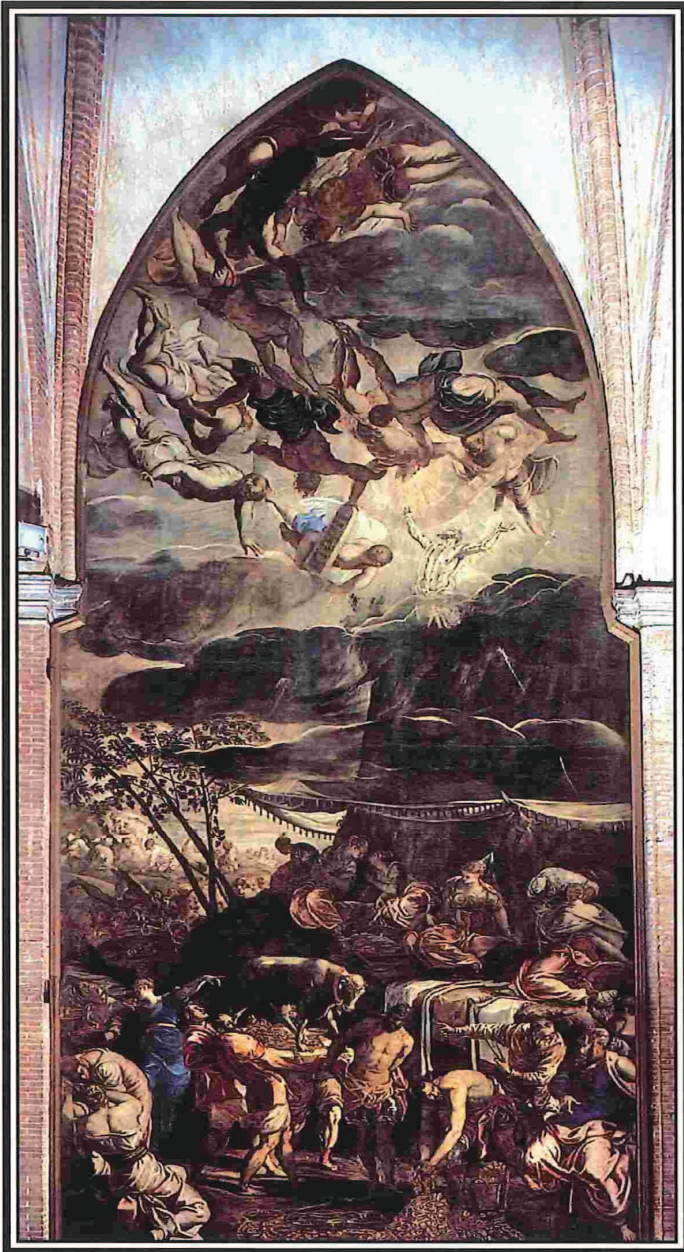
*“In all probability, the tablets were duplicates in line with the then current practices in covenant making where each party to a treaty had a copy of it to deposit in the temple of his god. It would there be open to inspection, and particularly in the case of vassal treaties, the vassal’s copy would be read out periodically as a reminder of the obligations he had undertaken. In Israel’s case, the overlord’s temple and that of the vassal were the same, and so both copies of the law were to be deposited in the ark.”* (McKay, p. 520)

The tablets are identified as “*the two tablets of the Testimony.*” The same designation will subsequently be applied to the Ark of the Covenant into which the tablets are to be placed (Exodus 25:22; 26:33), and to the Tabernacle itself (i.e. Numbers 1:50, 53), within which the Ark containing the tablets is located. The transference of the designation of the tablets to the sacred vessel which held them and the sanctuary in which the vessel was kept forcefully indicates the crucial significance of the tablets as the constituting document of the covenant. The term “*Testimony*” describes a repeated negative witness in the context of a courtroom. The sense of the word is clearly indicated in Moses parting words to the Children of Israel:

*“After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, he gave this command to the Levites who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. ‘Take this book of the Law and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God. There it will remain as a testimony against you. For I know how rebellious and stiff-necked you are...Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials so that I can speak these words in their hearing, and call heaven and earth to testify against them.’* (Deuteronomy 31:24 – 28)



*“Moses Receiving The Tablets Fashioned By God And Inscribed By His Hand Upon Sinai” by Joao Zeferino Da Costa*



*“Moses Receiving The Tablets From God Upon The Mountain While Israel Worships The Golden Calf” by Tintoretto*

The presence of the tablets within the Ark would stand as a permanent witness to Israel’s obligation to remain faithful to the commands of God and remove any possibility that the nation could claim to be unaware of that which the Lord required of His people.

The unique status and importance of the Ten Commandments is most remarkably emphasized by the words ***“inscribed by the finger of God.”*** This phrase is used elsewhere in Scripture in a figurative sense to express the work of God. Thus, for example, the magicians of pharaoh excused their inability to duplicate the plague of gnats by acknowledging the divine causation of the event: ***“The magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’ But Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not listen, just as God had said.”*** (Exodus 8:19) Christ Himself used this terminology in reference to His divine ability to cast out demons: ***“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”*** (Luke 11:20) Commentators typically suggest that our Lord’s use of the Exodus terminology is a deliberate association of Christ’s ministry to that of Israel’s greatest prophet, Moses, and what had been - prior to the incarnation - the most direct and significant revelation of God to Israel, the Ten

Commandments. In this instance, however, a literal reading of the text - would appear to be the intent of this singular wording. *“It is more likely that Yahweh has deliberately engraved the stone with His adamantine digit as easily as a man might write in the dust with his finger.”* (Propp, II, p. 495) The wondrous reality that the original two tablets of stone, alone among all of the divine revelations to Israel, were written by God Himself on sacred tablets which God had prepared, became the foremost indication of their premier status within the Torah. When Moses smashed these tablets in his rage over the Golden Calf, the text noted:

*“Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets...When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned, and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.”* (Exodus 32:15 - 16, 19)

In Deuteronomy, Moses later recalled the tragedy of the loss, using the same reference to the *“finger of God.”* *“The Lord gave me two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God. On them were all the commandments the Lord proclaimed to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day of the assembly.”* (Deuteronomy 9:10)

The two tablets remained in the Ark of the Testimony within the Holy of Holies throughout the era of the Tabernacle. 1 Kings specifies that the tablets remained within the Ark when it was installed in the Temple of Solomon on the day of its dedication.

*“When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests took up the ark, and they brought up the Ark of the Lord and the Tent of Meeting, and all the sacred furnishings in it. The priests and Levites carried them up, and King Solomon and all the assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the Ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted. The priests then brought the Ark of the Lord’s covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the Lord’s temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the Ark and overshadowed the Ark and its carrying poles...There was nothing in the Ark except the two stones which Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with Israel after they came out of Egypt.”* (1 Kings 8:3 - 9)

The final historical reference to the Ark of the Covenant comes in connection to the reforms of King Josiah in the latter days of the Kingdom of Judah. Josiah removed the idols which had been installed within the Temple and it was rededicated, at least briefly, to the worship of the true God. The stone tablets of the law are not mentioned in this reference, nor is the fate of the Ark known beyond this point.

*“Josiah celebrated the Passover to the Lord in Jerusalem, and the Passover lamb was slaughtered on the fourteenth day of the first month. He appointed the priests to their duties and encouraged them in the service of the Lord’s temple. He said to the Levites who instructed the people and who had been consecrated to the Lord; ‘Put the sacred ark in the Lord’s temple that Solomon, son of David, king of Israel built. It is not to be carried about on your shoulders.’”* (2 Chronicles 35:1 - 3)