

# A Daily Devotional on the Book of Exodus

By Ken Miller

WEEK 8 READING



[www.devotionalary.libsyn.com](http://www.devotionalary.libsyn.com)

[www.vesselsofclay.org](http://www.vesselsofclay.org)

**English Standard Version (ESV)** The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Permanent Text Edition® (2016). Copyright © 2001

**New Living Translation (NLT)** Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.



## The Price of God's Presence

<sup>1</sup> The Lord said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Speak to the people of Israel, that they take for me a contribution. From every man whose heart moves him you shall receive the contribution for me. <sup>3</sup> And this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, <sup>4</sup> blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats' hair, <sup>5</sup> tanned rams' skins, goatskins, acacia wood, <sup>6</sup> oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, <sup>7</sup> onyx stones, and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. <sup>8</sup> And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. <sup>9</sup> Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it." – Exodus 25:1-9 ESV

With the giving of the Law, God provided His people with clear guidelines for how they were to live their lives before Him. Now, beginning with chapter 25, God will give them His plan that will ensure His ongoing presence among them.

Ever since leaving Egypt, the people of Israel had grown accustomed to God's presence in the form of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. These two manifestations of God's glory had led them from the Red Sea all the way to Mount Sinai. Then, upon their arrival in the wilderness of Sinai, God's glory had taken up residence at the top of the mountain, in the form of a storm cloud. This atmospheric display of God's glory, with its crashing thunder and flashes of lightning, had so intimidated the Israelites that they refused to draw near the mountain.

*On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.*  
– Exodus 19:16 ESV

Moses makes it clear that God was in the midst of the cloud.

*The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain...* – Exodus 19:20 ESV

And God had explained to Moses why He had chosen to reveal Himself in this way.

*"I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever."* – Exodus 19:9 ESV

And God had Moses place boundaries around the base of the mountain, to prevent them from coming anywhere near His divine presence, upon pain of death.

*"...you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.'"* – Exodus 19:12-13 ESV

It was this holy, majestic, and all-powerful God who had just given them His Law. He was not to be trifled with. Rather, He was to be feared and obeyed. His glory was so great that it caused an entire mountain to tremble. His presence was so awesome that it could only be displayed by flashes of lightning and peals of thunder. Smoke and fire rose from the top of Mount Sinai as if it was an active volcano, but these fear-inducing displays of power were visual manifestations of God's glorious presence.

The Israelite's concept of God had been dramatically influenced by these supernatural climatic phenomena. God had been in the mobile pillar of cloud that had led them through the wilderness. He had been in the static storm cloud that for days had darkened the peak of Mount Sinai. But at this point in the narrative, God announces His plan to create a new place for His glory to dwell.

*“Have the people of Israel build me a holy sanctuary so I can live among them. You must build this Tabernacle and its furnishings exactly according to the pattern I will show you.” – Exodus 19:8-9 NLT*

For the next seven chapters, God will His detailed plans for the construction of the Tabernacle. This new structure was to be a “sanctuary” (שִׁדְרָה – *miqdāš*), a sacred or holy place, reserved solely for God's use and to serve as His temporary dwelling place on earth. This unique structure was designed to be transportable so that the people of Israel could move it from place to place as they made their way to Canaan. It was to be the “tabernacle” (מִשְׁכָּן – *miškān*) or dwelling place of God. In a sense, it was a large tent designed to accommodate the presence of Yahweh. When the Israelites broke camp, they were to dismantle God's “tent” and move it to the next location. Once they arrived at their new camp, the first thing they were to do was to erect God's tent and then place their own tents around it. It would become the focal point of their community.

But for now, God was giving His plans for its construction, and it would begin with each Israelite making a personal sacrifice to see that the Tabernacle became a reality. God was giving the details for its design, but the people would provide the resources for its construction.

*“Tell the people of Israel to bring me their sacred offerings. Accept the contributions from all whose hearts are moved to offer them.” – Exodus 25:2 NLT*

These gifts were to be given voluntarily and not under some sense of obligation. They were to be heartfelt and not guilt driven. It was important that the gifts reflect the attitude of the giver, demonstrating their willingness to place a higher priority on God's glory than on their own financial security.

God was asking for a lot. The cost to construct this “tent” for God was going to be high and it would require a great deal of sacrifice on the part of God's people. They were going to have to dig deep and give away the very best of what they had. Even by today's standards, the list is staggering.

*“...this is the contribution that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, goats’ hair, tanned rams’ skins, goatskins, acacia wood, oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones, and stones for setting...” – Exodus 25:3-7 ESV*

It’s important to remember that these people were former slaves who had left Egypt in a hurry. During their more than 400-year stay in Egypt, the Israelites had not been wealthy landowners and successful merchants, but they had made their living as shepherds. In the latter years of their Egyptian exile, they had been little more than indentured servants, working as an unpaid labor force for the Pharaoh. So, how were they supposed to come up with this formidable list of building materials? Where did God expect them to get these kinds of luxury items in the middle of the wilderness?

The truth is, God had already provided all the resources they would need. Years earlier, at the very same spot in the wilderness of Sinai, God had called Moses to be the deliverer of His people, and He had given His servant the following promise.

*“I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.” – Exodus 3:21-22 ESV*

And God kept that promise. Just before leaving the land of Egypt, Moses passed along God’s instructions to the Israelites.

*The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. – Exodus 12:35-36 ESV*

They literally stripped the Egyptians of their wealth – just by asking. And it seems that the Egyptians had been compelled to give up far more than just their silver, gold, and clothing. In their desperation to see the Israelites leave so that the deadly plagues would end, the Egyptians handed over everything of value. And this was all in keeping with the promise that God had made to Abraham hundreds of years earlier.

*“Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.” – Genesis 15:13-14 ESV*

So, when Moses unveiled the list of building materials required to construct God’s tent, the people didn’t panic or express disbelief. They gave – willingly and sacrificially.

*All whose hearts were stirred and whose spirits were moved came and brought their sacred offerings to the Lord. They brought all the materials needed for the Tabernacle, for the performance of its rituals, and for the sacred garments. Both men and women came, all whose hearts were willing. They brought to the Lord their offerings of gold—brooches, earrings, rings from their fingers, and necklaces. They presented gold objects of every kind as a special offering to the Lord. All those who owned the following items willingly brought them: blue, purple, and scarlet thread; fine linen and goat hair for cloth; and tanned ram skins and fine goatskin leather. And all who had silver and bronze objects gave them as a sacred offering to the Lord. And those who had acacia wood brought it for use in the project.*

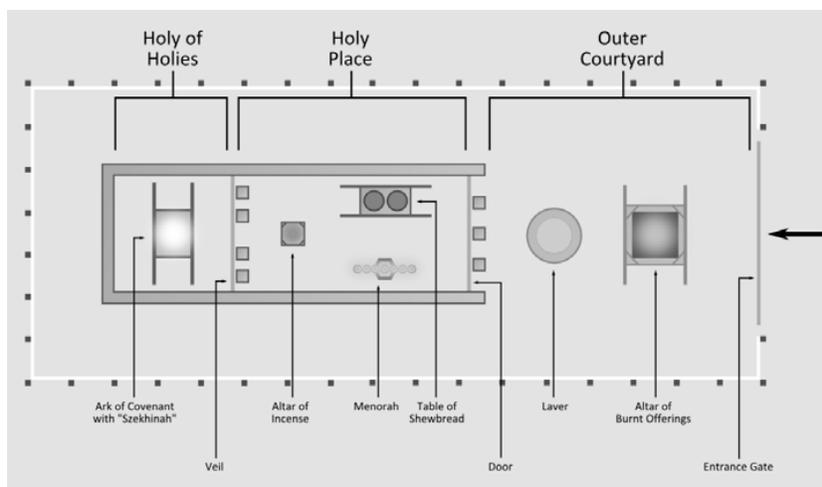
*All the women who were skilled in sewing and spinning prepared blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen cloth. All the women who were willing used their skills to spin the goat hair into yarn. The leaders brought onyx stones and the special gemstones to be set in the ephod and the priest's chestpiece. They also brought spices and olive oil for the light, the anointing oil, and the fragrant incense. So the people of Israel—every man and woman who was eager to help in the work the Lord had given them through Moses—brought their gifts and gave them freely to the Lord. – Exodus 35:21-29 NLT*

The people responded with eagerness and unselfishness. They freely gave up their most valued possessions so that God might dwell in their midst. The very materials they had been transporting through the wilderness in hopes of constructing their own future homes in Canaan, would become the resources for building the dwelling place of Yahweh. And little did they know at the time, that this “temporary” tent would serve as God’s house for nearly 500 years. It would not be until the reign of Solomon that a permanent Temple would be constructed to house the presence of God. Their gracious gifts of gold, silver, cloth, oil, and wood, all plundered from the Egyptians, would be transformed into a sacred structure to house the glory of their sovereign God, and ensure His presence among them.

## The Mercy Seat

<sup>10</sup> “They shall make an ark of acacia wood. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, a cubit and a half its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. <sup>11</sup> You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside shall you overlay it, and you shall make on it a molding of gold around it. <sup>12</sup> You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. <sup>13</sup> You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. <sup>14</sup> And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry the ark by them. <sup>15</sup> The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. <sup>16</sup> And you shall put into the ark the testimony that I shall give you.

<sup>17</sup> “You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. <sup>18</sup> And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. <sup>19</sup> Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. <sup>20</sup> The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. <sup>21</sup> And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. <sup>22</sup> There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. – Exodus 25:10-22 ESV



After communicating His command that the people build a sanctuary as His dwelling place on earth, God provided detailed plans for every aspect of its construction, but He didn't begin with the structure itself. Instead, He focused His attention on the three pieces of furniture that were to occupy the inner recesses of the tabernacle.



The very first item He described was the Ark of the Covenant. This was to be a rectangular box constructed from acacia wood and overlaid with gold. It was to be carried by two gold-covered poles that were inserted into golden rings affixed to its side. Inside this coffin-like container, Moses was to place “the testimony” or stone tablets that God would eventually give him.

But why did God begin with this particular piece of furniture? If the sanctuary was to be His dwelling place, why did He focus His attention on this ornate box? It was because the Ark of the Covenant would be the most important fixture in the entire Tabernacle.

“It was the exact place where God descended to dwell with his people, which of course was the purpose of the building. The very center of God’s presence was the ark of the covenant, which was located in the Holy of Holies – the innermost tent in the tabernacle. By starting with the ark, God was working from the inside out. He was putting first things first, beginning with the holy place of his dwelling.” – Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God’s Glory*

On top of the Ark of the Covenant, Moses was to place the Mercy Seat. This was to serve as the lid for the Ark but, more importantly, as a “throne” for God’s presence. God informed Moses that this “seat” would be the actual place where His presence came to dwell within the Tabernacle.

*“...you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.” – Exodus 25:21-22 ESV*

“The purpose of the ark was to contain the tables of the law, ‘the Testimony.’ But more than that, it represented the presence of God in a very special way. God promised that He would appear in a cloud upon the mercy seat which was on the ark in the most holy place. Into that place, ‘the Most Holy Place,’ the high priest would enter one a year to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat in order that the sins of the people might be atoned (Lev. 16).” – Maxie D. Duncan, *Exodus, The Preacher’s Commentary*

Little did Moses know that he was being commanded to construct a miniature replica of God’s throne in heaven. On top of the ark, he was to place two gold Cherubim or ministering angels, whose wings were to spread out over the Mercy Seat. This description matches the one provided by the apostle John in the book of Revelation when he was given a vision of God’s throne room in heaven.

*...a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and around the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal.*

*And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an*

*ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say,*

*“Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come!” – Revelation 4:2-8 ESV*

And the prophet, Ezekiel, was given a similar glimpse into God’s throne room, where he saw the same scene, complete with Cherubim spreading their wings before God’s presence.

*“above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him. Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” – Ezekiel 1:26-28 ESV*

The Mercy Seat was intended to be God’s throne on earth. It was there that He would come to dwell among His people, sitting above the Law He had given them. And it was there that, once a year on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest would come to offer a blood sacrifice for the sins of the people.

*“Each year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of animals sacrificed for the atonement of the sins of God’s people. This blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. The point conveyed by this imagery is that it is only through the offering of blood that the condemnation of the Law could be taken away and violations of God’s laws covered.” – gotquestions.org*

The Law, holy and righteous, would condemn the people of their sins. But the blood of the sacrificed animal, when sprinkled on the Mercy Seat, would atone or pay for those sins and purchase the people’s redemption. They would receive mercy rather than wrath. They would enjoy God’s forgiveness rather than condemnation. And all of this was to point to the greater sacrifice to come: Jesus Christ, the sinless Lamb of God. The apostle Paul explains how Jesus became the ultimate expression of God’s gracious gift of redemption from sin and death.

*But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.*

*For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us*

*from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus. – Romans 3:21-26 NLT*

And the author of Hebrews echoes Paul's words when he writes of Christ's atoning work on the cross that secured God's mercy for sinful mankind once for all time.

*So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.*

*Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people, so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant. – Hebrews 9:11-15 NLT*

The Mercy Seat in the Tabernacle was meant to foreshadow the future sacrifice of Christ that would atone for the sins of mankind. This simple, yet ornate, piece of furniture was to illustrate the unwavering righteousness of God through the presence of the two tablets of the Law. The golden cherubim were to be a reminder of God's holiness and His worthiness to be worshiped by all His creatures. And the Mercy Seat was to be the very place where God's presence came to dwell among His people and where their sins would have to be atoned for each year. They were an unworthy people who were incapable of keeping God's holy law. But, in His grace and mercy, God had provided a means of receiving atonement and forgiveness. Not only would He grace them with His presence, but He would bless them with His merciful and undeserved removal of their guilt and condemnation. And it all pointed to Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

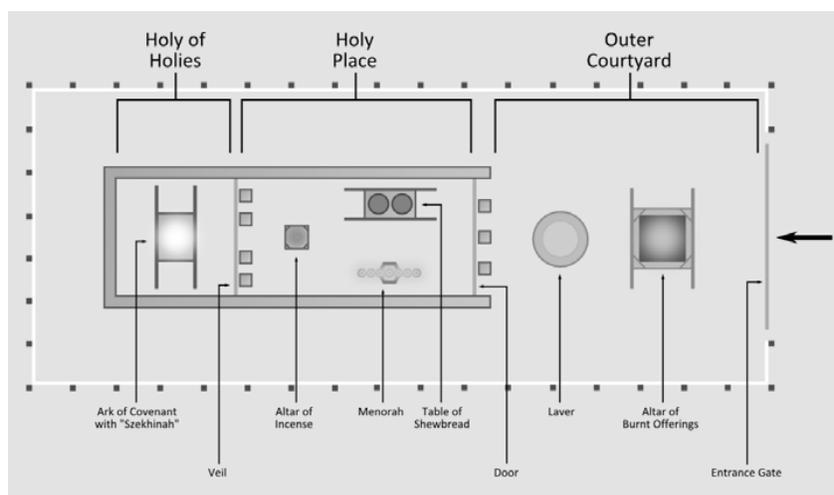
*For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf. And he did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal. If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever*

*since the world began. But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice. – Hebrews 9:24-26 NLT*



## The Table of Showbread

<sup>23</sup> “You shall make a table of acacia wood. Two cubits shall be its length, a cubit its breadth, and a cubit and a half its height. <sup>24</sup> You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it. <sup>25</sup> And you shall make a rim around it a handbreadth wide, and a molding of gold around the rim. <sup>26</sup> And you shall make for it four rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs. <sup>27</sup> Close to the frame the rings shall lie, as holders for the poles to carry the table. <sup>28</sup> You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these. <sup>29</sup> And you shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. <sup>30</sup> And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me regularly.” – Exodus 25:23-30 ESV



God gave Moses clear instructions regarding the building of the Tabernacle and the construction of each piece of furniture contained within it, and the author of the book of Hebrews states that they were “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5 ESV). God told Moses, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that

was shown you on the mountain” (Hebrews 8:5 ESV). The letter to the Hebrews goes on to state that, in heaven, there is a “greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation)” (Hebrews 9:11 ESV). So, all of the details surrounding the Tabernacle that God gave to Moses were meant to mirror or reflect a heavenly reality. God was giving Moses and the people of Israel a veiled glimpse into the glory of the heavenly realm. The Tabernacle would not be a massive or highly impressive structure. Its grandeur would not be found in its size but in the message it conveyed. It was designed to be the dwelling place of God, and every element of its design and layout was meant to point to God’s glory, holiness, and majesty.



Just outside the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant would be located, God designed an outer room called the Holy Place. In this small area, God instructed Moses to place three items: The Table of Showbread, the Golden Lampstand, and the Altar of Incense. The first of these items, the Table of Showbread, was a small coffee-table-sized piece of furniture upon which was to be placed the Bread of the Presence.

In the book of Leviticus, Moses recorded the details concerning the bread that was to be placed on this table.

*“You must bake twelve flat loaves of bread from choice flour, using four quarts of flour for each loaf. Place the bread before the Lord on the pure gold table, and arrange the loaves in two stacks, with six loaves in each stack. Put some pure frankincense near each stack to serve as a representative offering, a special gift presented to the Lord. Every Sabbath day this bread must be laid out before the Lord as a gift from the Israelites; it is an ongoing expression of the eternal covenant.” – Leviticus 24:5-8 NLT*

This bread was to be prepared each week and replenished every Sabbath day, as a memorial food offering to the Lord. It was meant to symbolize the Israelite’s belief in God’s literal presence within the Tabernacle and was presented as both a meal and an offering. But since Yahweh has no need for food, the bread would become the property of the high priest.

*“The loaves of bread will belong to Aaron and his descendants, who must eat them in a sacred place, for they are most holy. It is the permanent right of the priests to claim this portion of the special gifts presented to the Lord.” – Leviticus 24:9 NLT*

But the loaves of bread, like the table upon which there were placed, were to be considered holy and set apart to God. They were to be treated as sacred and had to be consumed in a holy place. And the table itself, while simple in its construction, was also to be considered holy and sacred. Its sole purpose was to hold “the bread of the Presence” (1 Kings 7:48 ESV). In a sense, the table served as a kind of TV tray, upon which the holy bread was placed before the presence of God. Just outside the Holy of Holies, on the other side of the veil, the priests would place the freshly baked bread on the table each Sabbath morning. Then they would return the following week and repeat the process. The sacred bread from the week before would become theirs to consume. What had been dedicated to God would become a source of sustenance for their own lives. And what a picture this paints of God’s grace and mercy. He took what had been dedicated to Him and shared it with others. The holy bread did not go to waste but was used to sustain the lives of the priests, who would serve as the mediators of God’s covenant promises.

It is not difficult to see the connection between the Bread of the Presence and Jesus, the “bread of life” (John 6:35). As the Son of God, Jesus shared in His Father’s attribute of holiness. He was fully righteous and completely sinless, and He lived to serve His Father.

*“For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. For it is my Father’s will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day.” – John 6:38-40 NLT*

Dedicated to God, Jesus was also destined to die. The “bread of life” was meant to be consumed by sinful humanity so that they might experience the gift of eternal life.

*“Yes, I am the bread of life! Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.” – John 6:48-51 NLT*

In the design of the Tabernacle, God made provision for the needs of His people. He planned for the construction of a special table that would hold the Bread of the Presence. Just as He had supplied the manna in the wilderness, God would provide sacred bread for His priests. This sanctified and set apart bread would become a source of sustenance for them as they ministered to the spiritual needs of their people. The psalmist reminds us of God’s gracious provision and His unwavering commitment to keeping His promises.

*He provides food for those who fear him;  
he remembers his covenant forever. – Psalm 111:5 ESV*

Years later, long after the people of Israel had occupied the land of Canaan and the Tabernacle was located in Shiloh, the Bread of the Presence would become a powerful lesson in the life of David, Israel’s future king. Finding himself running for his life because of the jealousy of King Saul, David fled to the town of Nob, where he sought the aid of Ahimelech the priest.

*David went to the town of Nob to see Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he saw him. “Why are you alone?” he asked. “Why is no one with you?”*

*“The king has sent me on a private matter,” David said. “He told me not to tell anyone why I am here. I have told my men where to meet me later. Now, what is there to eat? Give me five loaves of bread or anything else you have.”*

*“We don’t have any regular bread,” the priest replied. “But there is the holy bread...” – 1 Samuel 21:1-4 NLT*

According to the passage, the bread Ahimelech spoke of was the Bread of the Presence.

*Since there was no other food available, the priest gave him the holy bread—the Bread of the Presence that was placed before the Lord in the Tabernacle. It had just been replaced that day with fresh bread. – 1 Samuel 21:6 NLT*

David, who had been anointed to be the next king of Israel, was running for his life. He and his men were being pursued by King Saul’s guards and their lives were on the line. So, Ahimelech took that which had been dedicated to God and set apart solely for the priests, and shared it with God’s anointed one. And, in doing so, David’s life was spared.

Jesus would later refer to this scene when discussing the Sabbath with a contingent of Pharisees.

*“Haven’t you read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He went into the house of God and broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests can eat. He also gave some to his companions.” And Jesus added, “The Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath.” – Luke 6:3-5 NLT*

It’s interesting to note that David did not actually enter the Tabernacle and remove the bread from the Holy Place. But Jesus is emphasizing the gravity of what David did in consuming the Bread of the Presence. According to the Mosaic Law, David violated God’s command concerning the sacredness of the Bread of the Presence. Since David was not a priest, he was not permitted to consume the bread. And, in doing so, it was just as if he had entered the Holy Place and removed the bread from the table itself. Yet, rather than condemn David, Jesus excuses his actions.

As the Lord’s anointed king, David was free to eat the ceremonial bread. His life was key to the future of Israel. He had been appointed by God to serve as the next king of the nation. And Jesus, the bread of life, was free to take liberties with the Sabbath laws in order to complete the task assigned to Him by His Heavenly Father.

God had ordained that the bread be placed on the table in the Holy Place and, centuries later, when His anointed one was in need of sustenance, the bread was there to keep him and his companions alive. In the same way, God ordained that His Son would come to earth and become the bread of life. He would be set apart for a holy task and completely dedicated to doing the will of His Father. According to the apostle Paul, Jesus “humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8 ESV). And His death made possible eternal life for all those who would place their faith in Him.

*“Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” – John 6:58 ESV*

## The Golden Lampstand

<sup>31</sup> “You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work: its base, its stem, its cups, its calyxes, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it. <sup>32</sup> And there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; <sup>33</sup> three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. <sup>34</sup> And on the lampstand itself there shall be four cups made like almond blossoms, with their calyxes and flowers, <sup>35</sup> and a calyx of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out from the lampstand. <sup>36</sup> Their calyxes and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single piece of hammered work of pure gold. <sup>37</sup> You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it. <sup>38</sup> Its tongs and their trays shall be of pure gold. <sup>39</sup> It shall be made, with all these utensils, out of a talent of pure gold. <sup>40</sup> And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.” – Exodus 25:31-40 ESV

The opening lines of the book of Genesis tell of God’s creation of the universe, and it begins with His dispelling of darkness with light.

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.*

*Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. – Genesis 1:1-4 NLT*

In God’s grand plan for the universe He created, light would always be preferable to darkness. God deemed the light to be good because it symbolized His own nature.

*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. – 1 John 1:5 ESV*

*Whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. – James 1:17 NLT*

In the same way, God planned for a source of light that would penetrate the darkness of the Tabernacle. This tent-like structure was designed with no windows to let in the light of the sun. And in its innermost recesses, where the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies were located, the darkness would make these small rooms virtually unusable. In the impenetrable blackness of these spaces, the priests would have found it difficult to carry out their God-ordained duties. So, God designed a light source, “a lampstand of pure gold” (Exodus 25:31 ESV).



Within the Holy of Holies, God's presence was intended to dwell above the Mercy Seat which was located on the top of the Ark of the Covenant. Just outside the veil, in the Holy Place where the Table of Showbread and Altar of Incense were located, the Golden Lampstand would symbolize the light of God's presence. The flames from its seven lamps would illuminate the room and serve as a constant reminder of God's glory and holiness.

From God's description of the lampstand, it appears that it had a central shaft or trunk with six branches. At the top of the central shaft and six branches, oil lamps were to be placed. This meant that the lampstand offered seven sources of light to illuminate the Holy Place. This tree-like object was covered in almond blossoms made of pure gold. These budding "flowers" were intended to communicate the idea of light and life. This symbolic tree was to be a constant reminder of God's providential care for His people. Perhaps it was meant to serve as a symbol of the Tree of Life that was located in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:9). This same tree is mentioned in the final chapter of the book of Revelation. In his vision, the apostle John is given a glimpse of the New Jerusalem, the city of God that will descend from heaven and serve as the dwelling place of God among men. In that city, the Tree of Life reappears.

*Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations.*

*No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him. And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever. – Revelation 22:1-5 NLT*

Notice that there will be no need for lamps or even the sun, "for the Lord God will shine on them." In this eternal city, God's presence will come to dwell among His people, and John indicates that in this New Jerusalem, there will be no need of a Tabernacle or Temple.

*I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter*

*the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. – Revelation 21:22-27 NLT*

But in the Tabernacle God provided for the people of Israel, light would be a necessity. So, God designed a lampstand, a tree of light and life, to dispel the darkness and display His glory. And this lamp would serve as a foreshadowing of a greater and brighter light to come. It was Jesus who would later declare Himself to be the light of the world.

*“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” – John 8:12 ESV*

And the apostle John would describe the impact of this divine light.

*In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. – John 1:4-5 ESV*

But Jesus was more than just a source of light; He was the key to life, and He pointed the way to God. Yet, John reminds us that the light of the world was not well received by all.

*“...the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” – John 3:19-21 ESV*

To enter God’s presence is to enter the light. His glory and goodness expose our sins. But Jesus made it possible for those sins to be atoned for so that we might walk in the light and enjoy the illuminating presence of God in our lives.

The prophet, Isaiah, predicted the coming of the light of the world. Centuries earlier, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah wrote these promising words:

*The people who walk in darkness  
will see a great light.  
For those who live in a land of deep darkness,  
a light will shine. – Isaiah 9:2 NLT*

Then he went on to provide the identity of this “great light.”

*For a child is born to us,  
a son is given to us.*

*The government will rest on his shoulders.  
 And he will be called:  
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
 His government and its peace  
 will never end.  
 He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David  
 for all eternity.  
 The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies  
 will make this happen! – Isaiah 9:6-7 NLT*

The Golden Lampstand was to be placed in the Holy Place. It was reserved for the benefit of the priests. But the light of the world came to illuminate the lives of all men. He came to penetrate the darkness of sin and provide light to illuminate the way back to God. This child would grow to be a man, who would die on the cross for the sins of mankind. But He would be miraculously raised back to life as proof that His death had satisfied the just demands of a holy God. His dead body was placed in a cold, dark tomb, but that foreboding place was invaded by the light of God's glory when Jesus was resurrected.

The light still shines in the darkness. Jesus still illuminates the way to God. He remains the light of the world and the light of life, dispelling the darkness of sin and displaying the glory of God as He transforms the lives of those living in darkness. And the apostle John wrapped up the book of Revelation with this promising statement from the lips of Jesus Himself.

*“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this message for the churches. I am both the source of David and the heir to his throne. **I am the bright morning star.**” – Revelation 22:16 NLT*

## God's Dwelling Place

<sup>1</sup> “Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them. <sup>2</sup> The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall be the same size. <sup>3</sup> Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another. <sup>4</sup> And you shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set. Likewise you shall make loops on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set. <sup>5</sup> Fifty loops you shall make on the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite one another. <sup>6</sup> And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be a single whole.

<sup>7</sup> “You shall also make curtains of goats’ hair for a tent over the tabernacle; eleven curtains shall you make. <sup>8</sup> The length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits. The eleven curtains shall be the same size. <sup>9</sup> You shall couple five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves, and the sixth curtain you shall double over at the front of the tent. <sup>10</sup> You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the second set.

<sup>11</sup> “You shall make fifty clasps of bronze, and put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together that it may be a single whole. <sup>12</sup> And the part that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. <sup>13</sup> And the extra that remains in the length of the curtains, the cubit on the one side, and the cubit on the other side, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and that side, to cover it. <sup>14</sup> And you shall make for the tent a covering of tanned rams’ skins and a covering of goatskins on top.

<sup>15</sup> “You shall make upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood. <sup>16</sup> Ten cubits shall be the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the breadth of each frame. <sup>17</sup> There shall be two tenons in each frame, for fitting together. So shall you do for all the frames of the tabernacle. <sup>18</sup> You shall make the frames for the tabernacle: twenty frames for the south side; <sup>19</sup> and forty bases of silver you shall make under the twenty frames, two bases under one frame for its two tenons, and two bases under the next frame for its two tenons; <sup>20</sup> and for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side twenty frames, <sup>21</sup> and their forty bases of silver, two bases under one frame, and two bases under the next frame. <sup>22</sup> And for the rear of the tabernacle westward you shall make six frames. <sup>23</sup> And you shall make two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear; <sup>24</sup> they shall be separate beneath, but joined at the top, at the first ring. Thus shall it be with both of them; they shall form the two corners. <sup>25</sup> And there shall be eight frames, with their bases of silver, sixteen bases; two bases under one frame, and two bases under another frame.

<sup>26</sup> “You shall make bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, <sup>27</sup> and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the side of the tabernacle at the rear westward. <sup>28</sup> The middle bar, halfway up the frames, shall

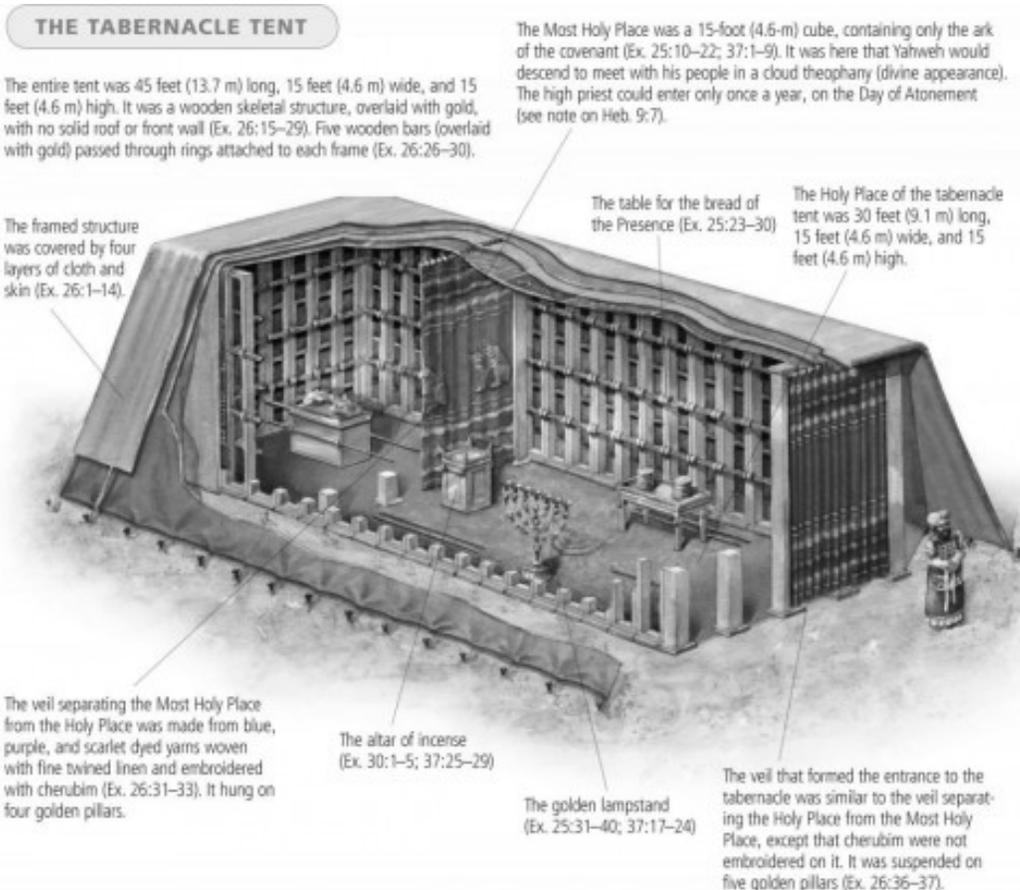
*run from end to end. <sup>29</sup> You shall overlay the frames with gold and shall make their rings of gold for holders for the bars, and you shall overlay the bars with gold. <sup>30</sup> Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain.*

*<sup>31</sup> “And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. <sup>32</sup> And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver. <sup>33</sup> And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy. <sup>34</sup> You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place. <sup>35</sup> And you shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand on the south side of the tabernacle opposite the table, and you shall put the table on the north side.*

*<sup>36</sup> “You shall make a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework. <sup>37</sup> And you shall make for the screen five pillars of acacia, and overlay them with gold. Their hooks shall be of gold, and you shall cast five bases of bronze for them.” – Exodus 26:1-37 ESV*

Having given Moses the plans for some of the key pieces of furniture that would occupy the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, God turned His attention to the design and construction of the Tabernacle itself. This inside-out perspective placed the emphasis on the inside of the Tabernacle, where God’s presence was meant to dwell. The Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat would be essential in assuring God’s continued presence among His people. The Bread of the Presence and the Golden Candlestick would each play important roles in maintaining the proper atmosphere of holiness so that God could dwell among His people.

The Tabernacle itself, while ornate and constructed of carefully crafted fabrics and precious metals, was nothing more than a glorified tent. Without God’s presence, it would have no worth or value. It would cease to be holy or sacred.



The detailed descriptions of the intricately woven curtains and veils that would form the walls and doorways of the Tabernacle can be a tough read. They are extremely specific but lack enough detail to provide an accurate blueprint of the structure's final form. When reading this chapter, there can be a temptation to fast-forward and skip over the seemingly unimportant architectural details it contains. But even these verses contain important insights into the glory of God and the significance this sanctuary would play in the lives of His people.

The construction of the Tabernacle would cost the Israelites dearly. It is estimated that as much as eight tons of gold, silver, and bronze was required to complete the Tabernacle. Then there was the huge volume of Acacia wood that had to be harvested and handcrafted to build its framework. The massive curtains made of twined linen and woven with blue, purple, and scarlet yarns, would have required countless hours to create. These beautiful curtains were 42 feet long and 6 feet high and had images of "cherubim skillfully worked into them" (Exodus 26:1 ESV). The time and skill it took to craft each one would have been monumental. And the number of goats and rams that had to be slaughtered to create the two layers of protective covering for the entire structure would have been staggering.

This was no ordinary tent. It was to be the house of God and the place where heaven would touch earth. Located in the middle of their camp, the Tabernacle would be the focal point of their community and the focus of their hope for the future. Its very design was intended to declare and display God's glory. The precious metals and colorful fabrics were all meant to

reflect the holiness of Yahweh. He was their King and He deserved a house that reflected His greatness.



While built to be portable, the Tabernacle also employed construction techniques that ensured its sturdiness. Nomadic-style tent construction usually incorporated a large canopy made of animal hide that was held up by a series of poles. Easy to assemble and take down, this style of tent construction accommodated the nomadic lifestyle. But the Tabernacle was meant to be more

permanent in nature. So, God designed it with an interlocking framework that used tenon and mortise joints to guarantee its stability. Over this skeleton of wood, the four layers of fabric and animal skin were draped. In its final form, the Tabernacle would have stood out among all the ordinary tents of the Israelites. In the wilderness context, this central structure would have looked like a palace when compared to the dwelling places of the Israelites.

When crafting all the elements that would form the final structure of the Tabernacle, the Israelites would have known that they were involved in something significant. This was a community-wide effort that would result in a one-of-a-kind structure where their God would come and dwell among them. They would not have taken this assignment lightly. Every detail had to be right. There was no cutting of corners or alterations to the plans in order to save time or money. They put everything they had into the creation of this sanctuary for their God.

God had told Moses, “let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst” (Exodus 25:8 ESV). This incredible promise from God would not have escaped them. In their minds, God occupied a distant and unapproachable place called heaven. For this transcendent, all-powerful God to offer to dwell in their midst was not something they took lightly. And the design of the Tabernacle was meant to reflect the glory of heaven coming to earth. The images of the angelic cherubim, the regal colors of blue, purple, and scarlet, the shimmering gold, and the throne-like Mercy Seat; it was all meant to mirror the majesty of God’s home in heaven.

God was now making His home among men. This image of God dwelling among men appears in John’s Gospel when he speaks of the incarnation of Jesus.

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14 ESV*

The Greek word translated as “dwelt” is σκηνώω (*skēnoō*) and it literally means “to fix one’s tabernacle.” Jesus, the Son of God, left His place in heaven to take up residence among men on

earth. For nearly 33 years, He “gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being” (Philippians 2:7 NLT).

Jesus, like His Heavenly Father, left the glory of heaven to enter into close fellowship with His people. God the Father took up residence in a tent made by human hands. Jesus, the Son, took up residence in a human body, a tent crafted by the hand of God. But notice how John states that “we have seen his glory.” The glory of God came to earth and dwelt among men. In describing the outward appearance of the Savior, Isaiah the prophet states, “There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him” (Isaiah 53:2 NLT). Jesus appeared like any other man. He occupied a normal-looking “tent” that had reflected no majesty or royal bearing. But He was “the visible image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15 NLT). And He came to make God known.

In the same way, the Tabernacle was meant to make God known and visible. Every time they looked at the Tabernacle, they would be reminded of His presence and assured of His ever-present power in their midst. And, one day, God will come to dwell with mankind again. The Revelation of John reminds us there is a day coming when God will return to earth and take up residence once again among His people. He and His Son will tabernacle among us once again, and for eternity.

*I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

*I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” – Revelations 21:2-3 NLT*



## The Bronze Altar

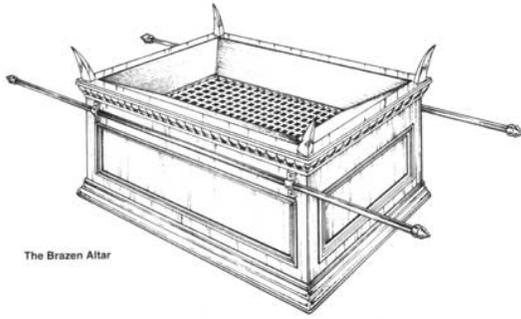
<sup>1</sup> “You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad. The altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. <sup>2</sup> And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. <sup>3</sup> You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and fire pans. You shall make all its utensils of bronze. <sup>4</sup> You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. <sup>5</sup> And you shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net extends halfway down the altar. <sup>6</sup> And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. <sup>7</sup> And the poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles are on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. <sup>8</sup> You shall make it hollow, with boards. As it has been shown you on the mountain, so shall it be made.” – Exodus 27:1-8 ESV

God had promised to dwell among His people. To do so, He commanded that they create a tent to house His divine presence. But this would be no ordinary tent. This elaborate and intricately detailed structure was to be a visual reminder of God’s holiness and glory. Every aspect of its design and construction was intended to reveal the nature of Yahweh. This God-designed but man-made sanctuary was filled with powerful imagery that served as an illustration of God’s sacredness and man’s sinfulness.

Thickly woven veils separated the inner recesses of the Tabernacle where the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies were located. No Israelite was allowed within these inner chambers. Within the Holy of Holies, the glory of God would dwell above the Mercy Seat, and within this small room, the high priest would enter once a year on the Day of Atonement. And he could only do so after going through an elaborate ceremony of purification on behalf of himself and the people. God would give Moses a stern warning to pass on to his brother, Aaron, whom God had chosen to serve as the high priest of Israel.

*“Warn your brother, Aaron, not to enter the Most Holy Place behind the inner curtain whenever he chooses; if he does, he will die. For the Ark’s cover—the place of atonement—is there, and I myself am present in the cloud above the atonement cover.”*  
– Leviticus 16:2 NLT

Even the high priest was prohibited from entering into God’s presence uninvited or in an impure state, upon penalty of death. God’s holiness was to be respected and feared. Just because God was choosing to dwell among His people did not give them a right to become complacent or cavalier about His holiness. God knew that His close proximity could easily produce an attitude of familiarity and a false sense of security.



So, this house in which the presence of God would dwell was accompanied by an altar. Just outside the doors that led into the Tabernacle, the Israelites commanded to place a specially designed altar on which they would offer sacrifices and offerings to God. It was on this altar that Aaron, on the Day of Atonement, would “present his own bull as a sin offering to purify himself and his family, making them right with the Lord” (Leviticus 16:6 NLT). Before the high priest

could enter the Holy of Holies, he must ensure that his own sins have been atoned for. His position alone did not afford him the right to enter God’s presence. As a fallen human being, his sin made him unworthy to come before the Lord. And as a representative of the people, he bore their sins as well. So, God demanded that Aaron make atonement for the people as well.

*“Then he must take the two male goats and present them to the Lord at the entrance of the Tabernacle. He is to cast sacred lots to determine which goat will be reserved as an offering to the Lord and which will carry the sins of the people to the wilderness of Azazel. Aaron will then present as a sin offering the goat chosen by lot for the Lord. The other goat, the scapegoat chosen by lot to be sent away, will be kept alive, standing before the Lord. When it is sent away to Azazel in the wilderness, the people will be purified and made right with the Lord.” – Leviticus 16:7-10 NLT*

The bronze altar, though located outside the walls of the Tabernacle, would prove to be the most essential piece of furniture in the entire complex. Without it, the high priest would never enter into God’s presence. It was on the bronze altar that atonement for sins would be made. Blood must be spilled before access to God could be enjoyed. The path to mercy, found in the presence of God, was through the altar. As the author of Hebrews states, “according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22 NLT).

On the Day of Atonement, Aaron would take the blood of the sacrificed animals and enter the veil of the temple in the Most Holy Place, where he would sprinkle it on the mercy seat.

*“Aaron must slaughter the first goat as a sin offering for the people and carry its blood behind the inner curtain. There he will sprinkle the goat’s blood over the atonement cover and in front of it, just as he did with the bull’s blood. Through this process, he will purify the Most Holy Place, and he will do the same for the entire Tabernacle, because of the defiling sin and rebellion of the Israelites. No one else is allowed inside the Tabernacle when Aaron enters it for the purification ceremony in the Most Holy Place. No one may enter until he comes out again after purifying himself, his family, and all the congregation of Israel, making them right with the Lord.” – Leviticus 16:15-17 NLT*

The blood made the mercy of God possible. Forgiveness of sin was only available after atonement had been made. So, the altar served as a kind of doorway into God's presence. It was the key to unlocking the mercy and forgiveness of Israel's holy and righteous God.

While no one other than the high priest would ever step inside the Holy of Holies and view the Mercy Seat, every Israelite could see "the altar of burnt offerings" (Exodus 30:28). Roughly seven and a half feet square and four feet high, this large object would be prominently visible in the courtyard of the Tabernacle. And every day, the Israelites would come to the altar and present their mandatory sacrifices.

*"These are the sacrifices you are to offer regularly on the altar. Each day, offer two lambs that are a year old, one in the morning and the other in the evening. With one of them, offer two quarts of choice flour mixed with one quart of pure oil of pressed olives; also, offer one quart of wine as a liquid offering. Offer the other lamb in the evening, along with the same offerings of flour and wine as in the morning. It will be a pleasing aroma, a special gift presented to the Lord." – Exodus 29:38-41 NLT*

This daily ritual was to be faithfully observed if the people wanted to continue to enjoy God's presence and benefit from His blessings. The bronze altar would become a familiar part of their daily lives. For 40 years they would utilize this God-ordained process for offering sacrifices and obtaining atonement. But according to the author of Hebrews, the Tabernacle, the altar, and the Mercy Seat were all temporary symbols of a greater reality to come.

*So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.*

*Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. – Hebrews 9:11-14 NLT*

The entire Tabernacle complex was intended as a foreshadowing of the atoning work of Jesus.

*...the Tabernacle and everything in it, which were copies of things in heaven, had to be purified by the blood of animals. But the real things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than the blood of animals. – Hebrews 9:23 NLT*

This earthly sanctuary, built by human hands, was intended to represent the glory of God's heavenly home. Access to God's throne room in heaven is restricted and available only to those who are free from sin. And when Jesus told His disciples, "No one comes to the Father except

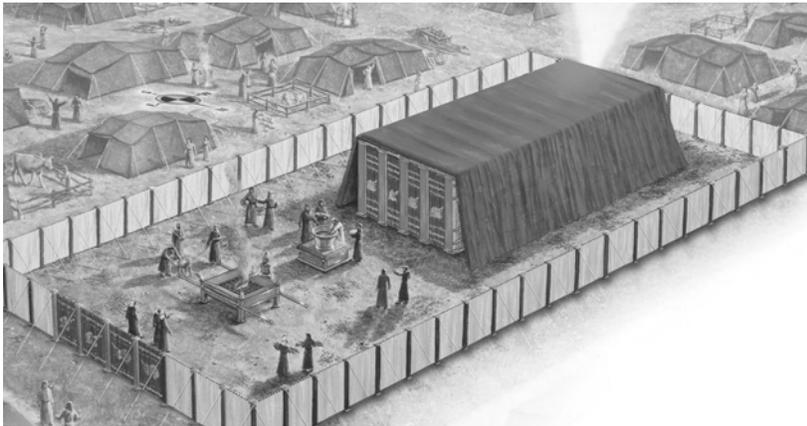
through me” (John 14:6 ESV), He was declaring Himself to be the doorway into God’s presence. And the author of Hebrews describes just how Jesus made access to the Father possible.

*For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf. And he did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal. If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice. – Hebrews 9:24-26 NLT*

With His death on the cross, Jesus satisfied the just demands of a holy and righteous God. In paying the penalty for mankind’s sins, He made atonement possible. He provided access to the Mercy Seat of God where forgiveness is poured out freely and fully. That is why those who place their faith in the atoning work of Jesus are encouraged to “come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most” (Hebrews 4:16 NLT).

## The Court of the Tabernacle

<sup>9</sup> “You shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side the court shall have hangings of fine twined linen a hundred cubits long for one side. <sup>10</sup> Its twenty pillars and their twenty bases shall be of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. <sup>11</sup> And likewise for its length on the north side there shall be hangings a hundred cubits long, its pillars twenty and their bases twenty, of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. <sup>12</sup> And for the breadth of the court on the west side there shall be hangings for fifty cubits, with ten pillars and ten bases. <sup>13</sup> The breadth of the court on the front to the east shall be fifty cubits. <sup>14</sup> The hangings for the one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. <sup>15</sup> On the other side the hangings shall be fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. <sup>16</sup> For the gate of the court there shall be a screen twenty cubits long, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework. It shall have four pillars and with them four bases. <sup>17</sup> All the pillars around the court shall be filleted with silver. Their hooks shall be of silver, and their bases of bronze. <sup>18</sup> The length of the court shall be a hundred cubits, the breadth fifty, and the height five cubits, with hangings of fine twined linen and bases of bronze. <sup>19</sup> All the utensils of the tabernacle for every use, and all its pegs and all the pegs of the court, shall be of bronze. – Exodus 27:9-19 ESV



[Photo: Tabernacle]

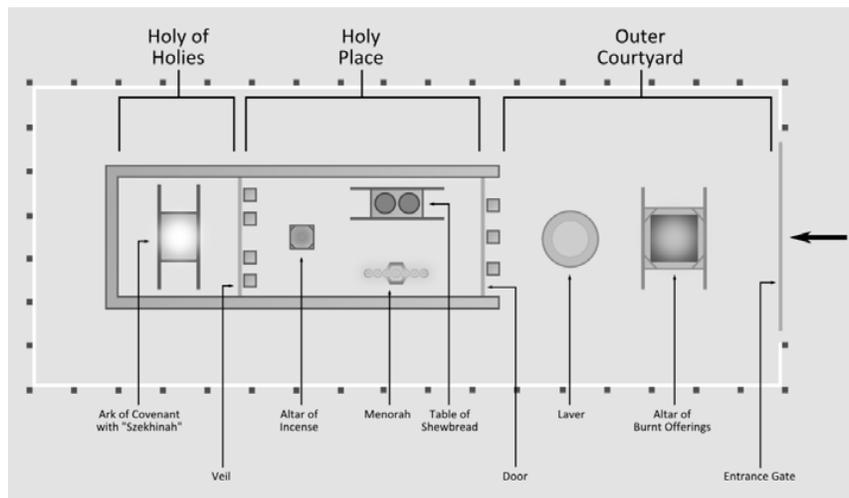
mountain.

The Tabernacle was meant to function as the house of God in the wilderness. But despite His willingness to dwell among them, God would not allow the Israelites to have free and open access to His presence. When God was preparing to appear on Mount Sinai to give the Law to Moses, He instructed Moses to put a barrier around the base of the

*“...the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death...’” – Exodus 19:11-12 ESV*

In the same way, God placed barriers around the Tabernacle so that the people would not be tempted to enter His presence. The Ark of the Covenant, upon which the Mercy Seat was located, was placed in the innermost section of the Tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies. It was in this secret and secluded area of the Tabernacle that God’s glory would reside and only the high

priest was allowed to enter once a year on the Day of Atonement. And even he had to go through an intense purification process before he could come before Yahweh.



The Holy of Holies was separated from the Holy Place by a thick veil. This handcrafted curtain was made from “finely woven linen” and decorated “with blue, purple, and scarlet thread and with skillfully embroidered cherubim” (Exodus 26:31 NLT). The curtain was hung from gold hooks attached to four posts of acacia wood. The

posts were overlaid with and set in four silver bases. And God made it clear that this curtain was to “separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place” (Exodus 26:33 NLT).

But the curtain was also designed to prevent anyone from viewing God’s glory. The Ark of the Covenant and Mercy Seat were considered holy and set apart entirely for God’s use. No human being was to touch them. That is why the Ark was made with poles designed for carrying it. Whenever it came time to break camp and move, the Tabernacle had to be deconstructed and transported to the next location. The Kohathites were responsible for carrying the Ark and the poles were there to protect them from touching the Ark as they moved it to the new campsite. And before the Ark could leave the inner recesses of the Holy of Holies, it had to be covered so that the Israelites would be prevented from seeing it.

*“The duties of the Kohathites at the Tabernacle will relate to the most sacred objects. When the camp moves, Aaron and his sons must enter the Tabernacle first to take down the inner curtain and cover the Ark of the Covenant with it. Then they must cover the inner curtain with fine goatskin leather and spread over that a single piece of blue cloth. Finally, they must put the carrying poles of the Ark in place.” – Numbers 4:4-6 NLT*

There is a story in the book of 1 Chronicles that reveals why God placed such stringent rules around the transportation of this one piece of furniture.

*David summoned all Israel, from the Shihor Brook of Egypt in the south all the way to the town of Lebo-hamath in the north, to join in bringing the Ark of God from Kiriath-jearim. Then David and all Israel went to Baalah of Judah (also called Kiriath-jearim) to bring back the Ark of God, which bears the name of the Lord who is enthroned between the cherubim. They placed the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from Abinadab’s house. Uzzah and Ahio were guiding the cart. David and all Israel were celebrating*

*before God with all their might, singing songs and playing all kinds of musical instruments—lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets.*

*But when they arrived at the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah reached out his hand to steady the Ark. Then the Lord's anger was aroused against Uzzah, and he struck him dead because he had laid his hand on the Ark. So Uzzah died there in the presence of God. – 1 Chronicles 13:5-10 NLT*

In his zeal, David ignored God's commands and Uzzah lost his life. These restrictions were real and the consequences for violating them were deadly. Everything about the Tabernacle was meant to convey the holiness of God. His presence among them was not an open invitation to treat Him with brazen familiarity or disrespect. The design of the Tabernacle was intended to be a constant reminder of God's glory and man's sinfulness. His "tent" was different than all the rest. It was ordained with precious metals and finely woven fabric. His home did not have a welcome mat outside the front door because sin separated the people of Israel from their God. The presence of the Bronze Altar outside the entrance of the Tabernacle was a vivid reminder that sacrifice was necessary before anyone could enter God's presence.

King David would later ask the question: "Who may worship in your sanctuary, Lord? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill?" (Psalm 15:1 NLT). And he would go on to answer his own question.

*Those who lead blameless lives and do what is right,  
speaking the truth from sincere hearts.  
Those who refuse to gossip  
or harm their neighbors  
or speak evil of their friends.  
Those who despise flagrant sinners,  
and honor the faithful followers of the Lord,  
and keep their promises even when it hurts.  
Those who lend money without charging interest,  
and who cannot be bribed to lie about the innocent.  
Such people will stand firm forever. – Psalm 15:2-5 NLT*

David was stating that no one was qualified to enter God's presence. Sin created a barrier that prevented anyone from waltzing into the sanctuary of God unannounced, uninvited, and unclean. It was David who also wrote:

*The Lord looks down from heaven  
on the entire human race;  
he looks to see if anyone is truly wise,  
if anyone seeks God.  
But no, all have turned away;  
all have become corrupt.*

*No one does good,  
not a single one!* – Psalm 14:2-3 NLT

This sad reality is the reason God placed so many restrictions and restraints on the Israelite's interaction with the Tabernacle. He even placed a fence around His house to prevent uninvited intruders or prying eyes.

"This fence marked the tabernacle's outer boundary. It measured approximately seventy-five feet by 150 feet, for a total area of more than 10,000 square feet. By way of comparison, this is roughly the size of four tennis courts. The Tent of Meeting took up less than 1,000 square feet; so there was plenty of open area. The courtyard fence consisted of sixty pillars set into sixty bases and joined by white linen curtains. The fence was nearly eight feet tall, which permitted the Israelites to see the top of the tabernacle and the smoke rising from the altar, but not what happened inside." – Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved For God's Glory*

There was only one entrance into the courtyard, and it led straight to the Bronze Altar, where sacrifice for sins was made. That was the key to entering God's presence. Sin separates man from God, but atonement restores fellowship. David also wrote of the joy of restored fellowship with God made possible through sacrifice.

*Though we are overwhelmed by our sins,  
you forgive them all.  
What joy for those you choose to bring near,  
those who live in your holy courts.  
What festivities await us  
inside your holy Temple.* – Psalm 65:3-4 NLT

Psalm 84 reflects the hope that the Tabernacle provided to the people of Israel. Their God was transcendent and holy, but He had made Himself available and approachable through the Tabernacle and the sacrificial system.

*How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O Lord of Heaven's Armies.  
I long, yes, I faint with longing  
to enter the courts of the Lord.  
With my whole being, body and soul,  
I will shout joyfully to the living God.* – Psalm 84:1-2 NLT

Sin was always the real barrier that prevented mankind from entering God's presence. When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, they were cast out and separated from the God with whom they once enjoy unbroken fellowship.

*After sending them out, the Lord God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. – Genesis 3:24 NLT*

And with the Tabernacle, God placed protective barriers around His presence so that His people might not die due to their sinfulness. But He also provided an entrance. There was a way to come into His presence, but it was only through the shedding of blood as atonement for sin. And it was this joyful reality that led the psalmist to write:

*A single day in your courts  
is better than a thousand anywhere else!  
I would rather be a gatekeeper in the house of my God  
than live the good life in the homes of the wicked.  
For the Lord God is our sun and our shield.  
He gives us grace and glory.  
The Lord will withhold no good thing  
from those who do what is right.  
O Lord of Heaven's Armies,  
what joy for those who trust in you. – Psalm 84:10-12 NLT*



## All For the Glory of God

<sup>20</sup> “You shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may regularly be set up to burn. <sup>21</sup> In the tent of meeting, outside the veil that is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the Lord. It shall be a statute forever to be observed throughout their generations by the people of Israel.

<sup>1</sup> “Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. <sup>2</sup> And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. <sup>3</sup> You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron’s garments to consecrate him for my priesthood. <sup>4</sup> These are the garments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests. <sup>5</sup> They shall receive gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen.” – Exodus 27:20-28:5 ESV

The Tabernacle was no ordinary structure. It was to be God’s earthly residence and, as such, it was to be built of the finest materials according to a divinely ordained plan. And within its perimeter fence and inner walls there were a number of unique pieces of furniture that set it apart as a temple or sanctuary. There was the Bronze Altar in the courtyard, designed for the offering of sacrifices to Yahweh. Located within the Holy Place were the Altar of Incense, Golden Candlestick, and Table of Showbread. And sequestered inside the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant with the Mercy Seat resting upon it. Each of these holy objects was designed to make this tent a temple to the worship of Yahweh and, like any temple, it required priests to serve as mediators between the people and their deity.

In the case of the Tabernacle, God assigned the priestly role to Aaron and his sons. Aaron would serve as the first high priest and his sons, Nadab and Abihu, would serve alongside him. Like the Tabernacle itself and all the elements contained within it, Aaron and his sons were to be set apart and consecrated for the service of God.

Moses and Aaron were brothers and members of the tribe of Levi.

*The sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. The descendants of Kohath included Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. The children of Amram were Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. The sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. – 1 Chronicles 6:1-3 NLT*

When God had called Moses to deliver the people of Israel from their bondage in Egypt, He had agreed to send Aaron, the older brother of Moses as an assistant.

*“Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. You shall*

*Speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what to do. He shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him.” – Exodus 4:14-18 ESV*

Aaron served alongside Moses during their days in Egypt as they attempted to secure the release of God’s people, then he assisted his brother as they journeyed across the wilderness to Sinai. And it was at Sinai that God set aside Aaron to serve as the first high priest of Israel and assigned his tribe to the care and maintenance of the Tabernacle.

*“Bring your relatives of the tribe of Levi—your ancestral tribe—to assist you and your sons as you perform the sacred duties in front of the Tabernacle of the Covenant. But as the Levites go about all their assigned duties at the Tabernacle, they must be careful not to go near any of the sacred objects or the altar. If they do, both you and they will die. The Levites must join you in fulfilling their responsibilities for the care and maintenance of the Tabernacle, but no unauthorized person may assist you.” – Numbers 18:2-4 NLT*

God’s house required careful attention. It was to be considered holy and treated with the utmost care. This was no ordinary structure, so it required extraordinary measures to ensure that it remained holy and free from defilement. Every facet of its maintenance was assigned to Aaron and his relatives, with special emphasis placed on Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu. These men were to serve as intercessors for the people before God, with the sobering responsibility to keep themselves and the Tabernacle itself pure and holy.

The people provided the materials used to construct the Tabernacle and its accouterments, but it was Aaron and his sons who were responsible for the ongoing care and utilization of this sacred structure and its content. God commanded the people to supply “pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may regularly be set up to burn” (Exodus 27:20 ESV). This oil would have been of the highest quality, carefully purified so that it would burn with a minimum of smoke. But it was up to Aaron and his sons to pour the oil into the seven lamps located on the Golden Lampstand within the Holy Place.

*Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the Lord. It shall be a statute forever to be observed throughout their generations by the people of Israel. – Exodus 27:21 ESV*

From this point forward, Aaron and his sons would no longer be free to live their lives according to their own wills. They belonged to God and were obligated to spend the rest of their lives serving at His behest. Their role was sacred and to be taken seriously because it ensured the ongoing presence of God.

The role of the priesthood of Israel was not just ceremonial in nature. It was both practical and essential for maintaining the purity of the Tabernacle so that God’s presence would remain among His people. Aaron and his sons had to ensure that the lamps in the Golden Lampstand

were always lit and properly maintained. They were also responsible for preparing the bread of the presence that was located on the Table of Showbread in the Holy Place.

*“You must bake twelve flat loaves of bread from choice flour, using four quarts of flour for each loaf. Place the bread before the Lord on the pure gold table, and arrange the loaves in two stacks, with six loaves in each stack. Put some pure frankincense near each stack to serve as a representative offering, a special gift presented to the Lord. Every Sabbath day this bread must be laid out before the Lord as a gift from the Israelites; it is an ongoing expression of the eternal covenant.” – Leviticus 24:5-8 NLT*

And each Sabbath, when Aaron and his sons replaced the bread of the presence with fresh loaves, they were allowed to consume the leftovers, as long as they did so in a holy place. God shared what had been dedicated to Him with His servants. These men were expected to serve the Lord day and night. They were commanded to tend the Golden Lampstand “from evening to morning before the Lord” (Exodus 27:21 ESV), so that the flames would never go out within the sanctuary of God. And the people of Israel found great comfort in knowing that God’s house was always under the watchful eye of His servants.

Years later, long after the Temple in Jerusalem had superseded the Tabernacle as the primary house of God, the people of Israel would gratefully acknowledge the priests for their role in its care and maintenance.

*Oh, praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,  
you who serve at night in the house of the Lord.  
Lift your hands toward the sanctuary,  
and praise the Lord.*

*May the Lord, who made heaven and earth,  
bless you from Jerusalem. – Psalm 134:1-3 NLT*

The first men to serve in this illustrious capacity were Aaron and his sons. God hand-selected them to perform the sacred role of the priesthood.

*“Call for your brother, Aaron, and his sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Set them apart from the rest of the people of Israel so they may minister to me and be my priests.” – Exodus 28:1 NLT*

God had Moses “set them apart.” In a sense, He was commanding that these men be separated from the rest of the nation of Israel and given an assignment that was not to be fulfilled by anyone else. And to help accentuate the distinctive nature of their role, God commanded that they be given garments that would set them apart.

*“Make sacred garments for Aaron that are glorious and beautiful. Instruct all the skilled craftsmen whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom. Have them make garments for Aaron that will distinguish him as a priest set apart for my service.” – Exodus 28:2-3 NLT*



These “sacred garments” were meant to distinguish Aaron and his sons from the rest of the Israelite community. The Hebrew word for “sacred” is *קֹדֶשׁ* (*qōdeš*), and it refers to that which is holy and set apart to God. The distinctive and beautifully crafted garments would serve as visual reminders to the rest of the Israelites that these men were agents and servants of God. They belonged to Him and were to be treated with dignity and honor. And these glorious and beautiful robes were also meant to remind Aaron and his sons that they were servants of the Most High God. In a sense, the clothes were intended to be signs of ownership and symbols of the sacred role of the priest.

*“These garments were set apart for sacred duty: holy clothes for a holy calling. What the high priest wore showed that what he did – whether it was lighting the lampstand or offering sacrifices on the altar – was holy before God.” – Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved For God’s Glory**

Like the Tabernacle in which he served, the high priest was robed in the finest fabrics. His garments were intended to reflect the glory of God. They were not a status symbol meant to inflate Aaron’s ego. Their glorious and beautiful design was a reflection of God’s majesty and transcendence. God’s house and servants were immaculately robed in splendor so that they might depict His glory and greatness among the people. As David later wrote in one of his Psalms, even the angels in heaven were created to bring glory and honor to God.

*Honor the Lord, you heavenly beings;*

*honor the Lord for his glory and strength.*

*Honor the Lord for the glory of his name.*

*Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. – Psalm 29:1-2 NLT*

## Our Great High Priest

<sup>6</sup> “And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and of fine twined linen, skillfully worked. <sup>7</sup> It shall have two shoulder pieces attached to its two edges, so that it may be joined together. <sup>8</sup> And the skillfully woven band on it shall be made like it and be of one piece with it, of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen. <sup>9</sup> You shall take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, <sup>10</sup> six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth. <sup>11</sup> As a jeweler engraves signets, so shall you engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall enclose them in settings of gold filigree. <sup>12</sup> And you shall set the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. And Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for remembrance. <sup>13</sup> You shall make settings of gold filigree, <sup>14</sup> and two chains of pure gold, twisted like cords; and you shall attach the corded chains to the settings.” – Exodus 28:6-14 ESV



God went into great detail when describing the sacred garments to be worn by Aaron in his role as the high priest of Israel. In his capacity as God’s representative and the nation’s mediator, Aaron was tasked with maintaining the sanctity of the Tabernacle but also the purity of God’s people. This ordinary man was given the extraordinary responsibility of entering into God’s presence on behalf of his entire nation, and God ensured that his priestly vestments displayed the distinctive nature of his role. God would robe His servant in garments of righteousness and representation. Aaron was to be clothed in beautifully handcrafted robes, a linen ephod, and an ornate breastplate adorned with precious stones in a setting of gold.

Like the elements that made up the Tabernacle, Aaron’s priestly garments were meant to reflect the glory of God and distinguish the high priest as a servant of God. Everything about Tabernacle was designed to display God’s glory, beauty, and holiness, including the attire of the high priest. When Aaron served in his role as high priest, he was to dress the part, bearing garments that honored the glory and greatness of God. And, as God makes clear, every time Aaron donned his priestly vestments, he did so on behalf of the people of Israel.

The linen ephod was the foundational piece of Aaron’s wardrobe. It was to be created by skilled craftsmen using finely woven linen that was embroidered with gold, blue, purple, and scarlet thread. The exact nature of the embroidered pattern is not provided, but God indicates that this robe was to be of two pieces, forming a front and back that were “joined at the shoulders with two shoulder-pieces” (Exodus 28:7 ESV). A decorative sash was to be tied around Aaron’s waist to hold the two halves of the ephod in place as he went about his duties.

Each shoulder piece was to be adorned with an onyx stone engraved with six of the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. Each time Aaron entered the Tabernacle, he literally bore the nation of Israel on his shoulders. And God declared that these symbolic stones were to serve “as a reminder that Aaron represents the people of Israel” (Exodus 28:12 ESV).

The role of the high priest came with a weighty responsibility. The people were not allowed to enter God’s presence because of their sinfulness. Even Aaron had to go through an extensive purification process before he could come before the Lord. And each time he did, he carried the 12 tribes of Israel with him. He bore the burden of acting as their priestly representative before God. And this vital role takes on even greater weight when you consider the statement God made to the people of Israel when they first arrived at Mount Sinai.

*“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” – Exodus 19:5-6 ESV*

Aaron represented the people. Their priesthood was lived out through his life and service. They were prohibited from coming into God’s presence, but this one man was given the responsibility of serving as their substitute. The obedient fulfillment of his God-ordained obligation would help ensure that the people of Israel remained a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

The author of Hebrews provides a fascinating insight into the mediatory role of the high priest.

*Every high priest is a man chosen to represent other people in their dealings with God. He presents their gifts to God and offers sacrifices for their sins. And he is able to deal gently with ignorant and wayward people because he himself is subject to the same weaknesses. That is why he must offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as theirs. – Hebrews 5:1-3 NLT*

Aaron was not sinless, yet he was tasked with representing sinful people before God. In order to do so, he had to undergo purification and receive atonement for his own sins before he could serve as their mediator. And the author of Hebrews stresses that Aaron did not choose his position as high priest and he had done nothing to earn it. He had been chosen by God.

*“no one can become a high priest simply because he wants such an honor. He must be called by God for this work, just as Aaron was. That is why Christ did not honor himself by assuming he could become High Priest. No, he was chosen by God... – Hebrews 5:4-5 NLT*

Aaron foreshadowed the greater high priest to come. And the author of Hebrews points out that Jesus was also chosen to serve in this role just as His predecessor was.

*God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. – Hebrews 5:9 NLT*

But the primary difference is that Jesus, as the Son of God, was sinless and wholly righteous. He required no ceremonial cleansing from sin. He was righteous in every way and yet, as high priest, he did offer up a blood sacrifice so that sinful humanity might receive atonement, and the sacrifice He made was His own life.

*So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever. – Hebrews 9:11-12 NLT*

Aaron could not fully atone for the sins of his fellow Israelites. All his sacrifices were temporary and had to be repeated over and over again.

*The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. – Hebrews 10:1 NLT*

Aaron's ornate and beautifully crafted robes did not make him righteous. They were garments that symbolized the righteousness of God but they could not bestow righteousness to Aaron. So, in order for him to bear the people before God, he had to be purified, time and time again. And, once again, the author of Hebrews notes the futility built into this system.

*If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared. But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. – Hebrews 10:2-3 NLT*

And he clarifies why the Old Testament model of sacrifice was insufficient.

*For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. – Hebrews 10:4 NLT*

Aaron and his successors would continue this process of purification for sins so that atonement might be made, but it would prove to be a never-ending cycle of sin, sacrifice, and sanctification. Aaron's role as a mediator would never stop. He couldn't take a day off. There would never be a time when he could forego his own cleansing. Day after day, year after year, the sacrifices would have to be made so that atonement could be received. But the book of Hebrews states, "God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time" (Hebrews 10:10 ESV).

Aaron was meant to be a type of Christ. He served as a foreshadowing of the future high priest who “offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time” (Hebrews 10:12 NLT). God had a plan for man’s redemption in place and He telegraphed it through the Tabernacle and the role of the high priest. And the apostle Paul reminds us that Jesus was able to accomplish is full what Aaron could only do in part.

*He [God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. – Colossians 1:13-14 NLT*

*So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. – Ephesians 1:6-7 NLT*

## The Breastpiece of Judgment

<sup>15</sup> “You shall make a breastpiece of judgment, in skilled work. In the style of the ephod you shall make it—of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen shall you make it. <sup>16</sup> It shall be square and doubled, a span its length and a span its breadth. <sup>17</sup> You shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle shall be the first row; <sup>18</sup> and the second row an emerald, a sapphire, and a diamond; <sup>19</sup> and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; <sup>20</sup> and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold filigree. <sup>21</sup> There shall be twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel. They shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes. <sup>22</sup> You shall make for the breastpiece twisted chains like cords, of pure gold. <sup>23</sup> And you shall make for the breastpiece two rings of gold, and put the two rings on the two edges of the breastpiece. <sup>24</sup> And you shall put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edges of the breastpiece. <sup>25</sup> The two ends of the two cords you shall attach to the two settings of filigree, and so attach it in front to the shoulder pieces of the ephod. <sup>26</sup> You shall make two rings of gold, and put them at the two ends of the breastpiece, on its inside edge next to the ephod. <sup>27</sup> And you shall make two rings of gold, and attach them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, at its seam above the skillfully woven band of the ephod. <sup>28</sup> And they shall bind the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a lace of blue, so that it may lie on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, so that the breastpiece shall not come loose from the ephod. <sup>29</sup> So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to regular remembrance before the Lord. <sup>30</sup> And in the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron’s heart, when he goes in before the Lord. Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the Lord regularly.” – Exodus 28:15-30 ESV



The high priest’s sacred garment was to include a second feature: the breastpiece of judgment. This smaller, color-coordinated accessory was also made of fine linen and woven with gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarns. It hung from two gold chains which were attached to the shoulder straps of the linen ephod. This long piece of handcrafted fabric was folded into a square and stitched on three sides, forming a pocket. Attached to the front of the breastpiece were 12 precious gems, each engraved with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. The gems were surrounded with gold filigree, accentuating the beauty and worth of each stone. Inside the pocket of the breastpiece were placed the Urim and Thummim, special stones used to discern the will of God.

“The purpose of the breastpiece was ‘for making decisions’ (v. 15). The Urim and Thummim, deposited in the pouch, were sacred lots used as the ‘means of making decisions’ (v. 30). The word ‘Urim’ begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet and ‘Thummim’ begins with the last letter, so the lots were probably restricted to giving either positive or negative responses to questions asked of them. Strengthening that likelihood is the fact that the phrase ‘Urim and Thummim’ is best translated into English as ‘curses and perfections,’ meaning that if ‘Urim’ dominated when the lots were cast the answer would be no but if ‘Thummim’ dominated the answer would be yes.” – Ronald Youngblood, *Exodus*

Little is known about how the Urim and Thummim were used, but in the book of Numbers, Moses told his successor, Joshua, that these “sacred lots” were to be used to “determine everything” the Israelites were to do.

*“When direction from the Lord is needed, Joshua will stand before Eleazar the priest, who will use the Urim—one of the sacred lots cast before the Lord—to determine his will. This is how Joshua and the rest of the community of Israel will determine everything they should do.”* – Numbers 27:21 NLT

In the book of Joshua, it appears that the Urim and Thummim were used to determine who among the Israelites was guilty of violating the command of God.

*“In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes. And the tribe that the Lord takes by lot shall come near by clans. And the clan that the Lord takes shall come near by households. And the household that the Lord takes shall come near man by man.”* – Joshua 7:14 ESV

Prior to their defeat of the city of Jericho, God had given the Israelites clear instructions regarding what to do with the plunder of the city.

*“Do not take any of the things set apart for destruction, or you yourselves will be completely destroyed, and you will bring trouble on the camp of Israel. Everything made from silver, gold, bronze, or iron is sacred to the Lord and must be brought into his treasury.”* – Joshua 6:18-19 ESV

But a man named Achan had violated God’s command, and his son resulted in the Israelites’ failure to conquer the much smaller city of Ai. Apparently, the Urim and Thummim were used to determine the identity of the guilty party. For whatever reason, God chose to use this rather strange system to guide Joshua and the people of Israel. Rather than speaking to Joshua directly, as He had done with Moses, God provided the Urim and Thummim as the primary means for revealing His will. And because the Urim and Thummim were under the care of the high priest, Joshua was required to seek the aid of Eleazar in order to receive direction from God.

This breastpiece worn by the high priest was adorned with the 12 gemstones, signifying the 12 sons of Jacob and the 12 tribes of Israel. Inside the pouch formed by the breastpiece were the Urim and Thummim, which were essential tools for determining God's will for the 12 tribes. And this vital accessory was worn next to the heart of the high priest, signifying both his role as mediator but also as shepherd of the people of God.

Two additional gold chains hung from the bottom of the breastpiece which attached to two gold rings affixed to the front of the linen ephod.

*"This will hold the chestpiece securely to the ephod above the decorative sash. In this way, Aaron will carry the names of the tribes of Israel on the sacred chestpiece over his heart when he goes into the Holy Place." – Exodus 28:28-29 NLT*

Aaron was to hold the people of God close to his heart at all times, especially when serving in his role as the high priest. Every time he entered the Holy Place to offer atoning sacrifices on behalf of the people, he did so as their representative. He bore the 12 tribes on his shoulders and close to his heart. And between his heart and the 12 stones representing the people of God, were the tools for determining the will of God.

God had made it perfectly clear that in order for the Israelites to remain His treasured possession, they would have to obey His will.

*"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." – Exodus 19:5-6 ESV*

Like priceless gems, the Israelites were of great value to God, and in his role as the high priest, Aaron was to share God's care and concern for them. By carrying the Urim and Thummim, Aaron would play an important role in determining God's will. But he would also serve as the agent of atonement, offering up the required blood sacrifices to cover the inevitable sins of the people.

In giving the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant, God made His will known. He had disclosed the laws that were to regulate the behavior of the people of Israel. They knew what was expected of them. The apostle Paul summed up God's expectations of His people when he wrote, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification..." (1 Thessalonians 4:3 ESV). When all is said and done, what God demands of His people is a life of holiness. He expects them to live in keeping with their status as His children. The Israelites didn't need the Urim and Thummim to determine how to live. God had already revealed that to them. These little-understood stones were to be used in special instances when the Law of God could not be applied. They were not to be used for personal decision-making but only for determining the will of God for the entire community of God. In the rare instance that the Law was not applicable, the nation was to seek the will of God through this divinely ordained decision-making system.

Every child of God wrestles with the desire to know God's will. But as the apostle Paul points out, the will of God is quite clear: He desires our holiness. Yet we tend to want God to be more specific. Who should I marry? What career path should I take? Is this the house you want me to buy? And it is not that God has no opinion about those matters, but it is that He is more concerned about your holiness. In most cases, our decision-making would be greatly simplified if we learned to ask the question: Will this decision help or hinder my pursuit of holiness? If I marry this individual will they become a partner in my desire to live a holy life? Will that job or career path pave the way to greater sanctification or lead me to a life of self-reliance and a love of the world?

As the high priest for the people of God, Aaron was given the tools to determine God's will. But from the sparse references to the Urim and Thummim in the Scriptures, it appears that they were infrequently utilized. Aaron knew what God expected of His people. The Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant were quite specific and left little to the imagination. God demanded holiness. And the primary role of the high priest was to help the people of God maintain their holiness by atoning for their sinfulness. Their purity was to be his highest priority.

## Holy to the Lord

<sup>31</sup> “You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. <sup>32</sup> It shall have an opening for the head in the middle of it, with a woven binding around the opening, like the opening in a garment, so that it may not tear. <sup>33</sup> On its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, around its hem, with bells of gold between them, <sup>34</sup> a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, around the hem of the robe. <sup>35</sup> And it shall be on Aaron when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the Holy Place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he does not die.

<sup>36</sup> “You shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, ‘Holy to the Lord.’ <sup>37</sup> And you shall fasten it on the turban by a cord of blue. It shall be on the front of the turban. <sup>38</sup> It shall be on Aaron’s forehead, and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord.

<sup>39</sup> “You shall weave the coat in checker work of fine linen, and you shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash embroidered with needlework.

<sup>40</sup> “For Aaron’s sons you shall make coats and sashes and caps. You shall make them for glory and beauty. <sup>41</sup> And you shall put them on Aaron your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests.

<sup>42</sup> You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh. They shall reach from the hips to the thighs; <sup>43</sup> and they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they go into the tent of meeting or when they come near the altar to minister in the Holy Place, lest they bear guilt and die. This shall be a statute forever for him and for his offspring after him.” – Exodus 28:31-43 ESV

The old proverb, “clothes make the man,” could easily be applied to the high priest and his sacred garments. Aaron was being given a divinely designed wardrobe that would allow him to enter the very presence of God Almighty. When performing his priestly duties, Aaron was to be outfitted from head to toe with a one-of-a-kind vestment that set him apart from every other Israelite. Underneath the richly ornamented garments, Aaron was just another man. He had no righteousness of his own and had done nothing to earn or deserve his status as God’s high priest. Yet God had chosen him to serve in this incomparable role and adorned him with exquisite garments that signified the sacredness of his calling. These garments were to be considered holy because they had been set apart for one purpose only. They were to be used solely for the worship of God. Aaron was not free to use them for any other purpose or leave the grounds of the Tabernacle while wearing them. They were to be his uniform when serving in the sanctuary of the Lord.

In the closing verses of chapter 28, God provides the final piece of the ensemble that Aaron was to wear: A blue robe made from a seamless piece of finely woven linen. It appears that this robe was shaped like a poncho with a hole in the middle for slipping it over the head. The collar

was reinforced to prevent it from tearing. Attached to the hem of the robe was a series of alternating ornaments.

*“Make pomegranates out of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and attach them to the hem of the robe, with gold bells between them.” – Exodus 28:33 NLT*

The pomegranates most likely symbolized fruitfulness, while the bells were intended to declare the actions of the priest as he ministered on behalf of the people. They could not enter the Tabernacle, so whenever the high priest went inside the compound to serve as their mediator, they could hear the sound of the bells and know that he was acting in their stead. He bore the name of their tribe on his shoulder and before his heart. And as long as the bells sounded, they knew that he had been accepted by God and was serving in their place before the throne of the Lord.

The sound of the bells was essential because it revealed that Aaron was still alive, and death was a distinct possibility every time the high priest entered into God’s presence. God even indicated that the bells would serve as a kind of early warning system, signifying that Aaron was approaching. God would later tell Moses, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” (Exodus 33:20 ESV). So, once a year, when Aaron entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, the bells would announce his intent to enter God’s presence.

*“And it shall be on Aaron when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the Holy Place before the Lord, and when he comes out, so that he does not die.” – Exodus 28:35 ESV*

Perhaps God’s glory departed the Holy of Holies prior to Aaron’s entrance, in order to prevent the high priest from seeing the face of God. The text is not clear. But in the book of Leviticus, Moses includes further details regarding Aaron’s once-a-year entrance into the inner recesses of the Tabernacle on the Day of Atonement.

*“Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with a bull from the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen coat and shall have the linen undergarment on his body, and he shall tie the linen sash around his waist, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water and then put them on.” – Leviticus 16:2-4 NLT*

Aaron had to take precautions when serving God because death was a real possibility if he did so in an improper manner. His garments had to be just right. He had to go through the proper purification procedures. And he was never to enter the Holy of Holies on any other day than the one prescribed by God – upon penalty of death.

One of the final elements of Aaron's priestly outfit was the linen turban. Attached to the turban was a gold plate upon which were engraved the words, "Holy to the Lord" (Exodus 28:37 ESV). This emblem hung above the high priest's forehead and signified that he belonged to God. In a sense, his garments made him holy. They set the high priest apart as being the sole property of God and dedicated entirely to His use and for His glory. And this was to be true of Aaron's sons as well. They too were to wear holy garments that signified their status as God's chosen vessels.

*"For Aaron's sons, make tunics, sashes, and special head coverings that are glorious and beautiful. Clothe your brother, Aaron, and his sons with these garments, and then anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they can serve as my priests."* – Exodus 28:40-41  
NLT

These men had been given the incredible privilege and responsibility of serving the God of the universe, and they were not to take it lightly. Even their undergarments were meant to set them apart as God's chosen servants and were designed to protect them from uncovering their nakedness before the Lord.

*"These must be worn whenever Aaron and his sons enter the Tabernacle or approach the altar in the Holy Place to perform their priestly duties. Then they will not incur guilt and die."* – Exodus 28:43 NLT

God made provisions for everything. Any form of immodesty would have been unacceptable when serving in the house of God, so God designed holy undergarments to prevent Aaron and his sons from exposing themselves to one another while performing their priestly duties. God took every precaution to ensure that His servants remained "Holy to the Lord" in all that they did.

But there is a story recorded in the book of Leviticus that reveals how Aaron's sons failed to fully appreciate the holiness of their calling. Despite all of God's warnings and the precautions He took to ensure their safety when serving in His house, Nadab and Abihu took liberties with their position and chose to do God's will their own way.

*Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu put coals of fire in their incense burners and sprinkled incense over them. In this way, they disobeyed the Lord by burning before him the wrong kind of fire, different than he had commanded. So fire blazed forth from the Lord's presence and burned them up, and they died there before the Lord.*

*Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord meant when he said,*

*'I will display my holiness  
through those who come near me.  
I will display my glory  
before all the people.'"*

*And Aaron was silent.* – Leviticus 10:1-3 NLT

There is no explanation given as to what is meant by “the wrong kind of fire.” In Hebrew, it refers to “unauthorized fire.” Evidently, Nadab and Abihu did not follow God’s commands regarding the proper use of the Altar of Incense. There are some scholars who believe that whatever these two men did was done in a state of drunkenness, because immediately after their deaths, God gave Aaron a new prohibition banning the consumption of alcohol while serving in the Tabernacle.

*“You and your descendants must never drink wine or any other alcoholic drink before going into the Tabernacle. If you do, you will die. This is a permanent law for you, and it must be observed from generation to generation. You must distinguish between what is sacred and what is common, between what is ceremonially unclean and what is clean.”* – Leviticus 10:9-10 NLT

But this sad incident reveals that clothes do not make the man. Nadab and Abihu may have been wearing the holy garments, but their hearts remained distant from God. Their outer appearance did nothing to change their inner dispositions. And Jesus would accuse the religious leaders of His day of having the very same problem.

*“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and every kind of impurity. In the same way, on the outside you appear to be righteous, but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”* – Matthew 23:27-28 BSB

Yes, the robes of the high priest and his sons were important. But those sacred garments could not make Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu holy. Priestly robes cannot alter a man’s heart or change his character. Sadly, they can actually serve as camouflage, covering up the reality within, and that was the case for Nadab and Abihu. They looked like priests, set apart for the service of God, but they were actually whitewashed tombs, full of dead men’s bones. To all the people of Israel, Aaron’s sons looked the part, but God had a different perspective.

*“...the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”* – 1 Samuel 16:7 ESV

## Robed in Righteousness

<sup>1</sup> “Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. Take one bull of the herd and two rams without blemish, <sup>2</sup> and unleavened bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers smeared with oil. You shall make them of fine wheat flour. <sup>3</sup> You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, and bring the bull and the two rams. <sup>4</sup> You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. <sup>5</sup> Then you shall take the garments, and put on Aaron the coat and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the skillfully woven band of the ephod. <sup>6</sup> And you shall set the turban on his head and put the holy crown on the turban. <sup>7</sup> You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him. <sup>8</sup> Then you shall bring his sons and put coats on them, <sup>9</sup> and you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes and bind caps on them. And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever. Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.

<sup>10</sup> “Then you shall bring the bull before the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull. <sup>11</sup> Then you shall kill the bull before the Lord at the entrance of the tent of meeting, <sup>12</sup> and shall take part of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and the rest of the blood you shall pour out at the base of the altar. <sup>13</sup> And you shall take all the fat that covers the entrails, and the long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and burn them on the altar. <sup>14</sup> But the flesh of the bull and its skin and its dung you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering.

<sup>15</sup> “Then you shall take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, <sup>16</sup> and you shall kill the ram and shall take its blood and throw it against the sides of the altar. <sup>17</sup> Then you shall cut the ram into pieces, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and its head, <sup>18</sup> and burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the Lord. It is a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord.

<sup>19</sup> “You shall take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram, <sup>20</sup> and you shall kill the ram and take part of its blood and put it on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet, and throw the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar. <sup>21</sup> Then you shall take part of the blood that is on the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and his sons’ garments with him. He and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons’ garments with him.” – Exodus 29:1-21 ESV

God had given Moses His construction plans for the Tabernacle and its elements. He had provided the designs for the sacred garments of the priests. Now, He gave Moses instructions for the consecration of Aaron and his sons so that they might serve as His holy representatives before the people.

Once the Tabernacle was complete and ready for use, there would be one final step before God’s presence could dwell among His people. God had appointed Aaron and his sons to serve

as priests and He had assigned given them the high honor and heavy responsibility of maintaining the spiritual welfare of the entire nation. The priests and the entire Tabernacle in which they would serve had to be thoroughly purified and consecrated to prepare the way for the Lord's presence.

Despite the Tabernacle's ornate and rather lavish design, it was still just a glorified tent. The elements contained inside its decorative walls, though covered in gold and decorated with precious gems, were just ordinary objects made with human hands. Those who had been chosen to wear the sacred garments and enter the inner recesses of the sanctuary were just ordinary men.

When the people of Israel looked at the Tabernacle, they would see a structure they had helped to build. Their contributions had helped to fund its construction. Their sweat equity had transformed the words of God into a reality, and as they stood before the completed structure, they could take pride in what they had accomplished. So, it was essential that the people understand the sacredness of the Tabernacle. During its construction phase, they would have entered into its various chambers and touched the objects that would later become off-limits. They would have been familiar with every nook and cranny of God's house and proud of the role they had played in its construction. But once completed, the Tabernacle would no longer be accessible. The gifts they had donated for its construction were no longer theirs. The doorway into the grounds of the Tabernacle would be closed to them.

The Tabernacle was meant to be a sacred space, set apart for God's use. But it had been made with human hands and constructed from earthly materials. When King Solomon completed his grand plan for the Temple in Jerusalem, he admitted, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27 ESV).

Centuries later, the apostle Stephen picked up on this thought in a sermon he preached to a crowd of Jews in the city of Jerusalem, not long after Jesus' death and resurrection.

*"...it was Solomon who built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,*

*"Heaven is my throne,  
and the earth is my footstool.  
What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord,  
or what is the place of my rest?  
Did not my hand make all these things?"* – Acts 7:48-50 ESV

And the apostle Paul would echo the words of Stephen in an address he gave at the Areopagus in Athens.

*“The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.” – Acts 17:24 ESV*

As Moses and his fellow Israelites stood back admiring the glorious Tabernacle they had helped to create, it would have been easy for them to take credit for its existence. They would have assumed that it somehow belonged to them. But God wanted them to know that this building, while magnificent and worthy of praise, was unfit for His habitation. God didn't need a house to live in. This Tabernacle was not for His benefit but for the benefit of the people of Israel. It would become a lasting symbol of His abiding presence and a vivid reminder of His holiness. But it all began on the day that Moses consecrated Aaron and his sons.



Chapter 29 of Exodus parallels chapter 8 of Leviticus. Each outlines the detailed instructions given by God to Moses for the elaborate opening ceremony of the Tabernacle. First on the agenda was the ordination of Aaron and his sons. Before they could serve in God's house, they had to be purified with water. Then their personal garments were replaced with the sacred robes provided for them by God. Once properly attired, Aaron and his sons were anointed with oil. This ritual was designed to signify their set-apart status. It represented the pouring out of God's Spirit

upon each of the men, preparing them to serve in His holy house.

But one further step was required before these men could enter God's presence. They had been ceremonially cleansed and robed in righteous garments but there was still the matter of their sin. To the human eye, they looked like priests and appeared to be holy and fully prepared for their role. But Moses was ordered to offer three different sacrifices to ensure that Aaron and his sons would be acceptable to God. Their garments could not take away sin. Though they looked like priests, they remained covered in guilt and unworthy to enter into God's presence.

The first sacrifice involved a bull that was offered as atonement for sin. Its blood was sprinkled on the horns of the altar, making it holy before the Lord. But before the bull was killed, Aaron and his two sons laid their hands on the animal, ceremonially transferring their sins onto the beast. Its death served as a substitute for their own. Their sin debt was paid for by another.

The next sacrifice was a ram and, as before, Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the animal before it was slain. Then its blood was sprinkled on the sides of the bronze altar and its entire body was burned as “a burnt offering to the Lord. It is a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord” (Exodus 29:18 ESV).

“By consuming the entire animal, God was indicating that he had completely accepted the worshiper, and as it was a sweet smelling fire sacrifice, he was indicating that he was pleased to accept it. By offering the entire animal, the worshiper was indicating on his part a complete surrender to God.” – *NET Bible Study Notes*

The final sacrifice involved a second ram on which Aaron and his sons laid their hands. In this case, the blood of the ram was placed “on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet” (Exodus 29:20 ESV). This sacrifice was unique to Aaron and his two sons. It was intended to set them apart for their service as priests. In this case, the blood was not for atonement but for sanctification. It consecrated them for their unique role as God’s mediators. Covered in oil and blood, the men were ready to serve the Lord.

Their lavish garments were now soaked with oil and stained with blood, and it was in this macabre state that they were able to enter into God’s presence. When Aaron and his sons made their way into the Tabernacle for the first time, they did so by virtue of the blood. The author of Hebrews reminds us that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22 ESV). Moses was required to shed innocent blood so that his brother Aaron might receive atonement. He had to take life so that the lives of his brother and nephews might be spared and so that they might serve the spiritual needs of the people.

Jesus did the same thing for us when He gave His life as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. The entire Tabernacle and the rites and rituals surrounding it point to Christ. Once again, the author of Hebrews makes the connection between the two.

*For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. – Hebrews 13:11-12 ESV*

Aaron and his sons were now ready to enter God’s presence. But this elaborate ritual would have to be repeated over and over again before they could serve in God’s house. As sinners, they remained unfit for service without the blood sacrifice and the purification process that accompanied it. This entire ceremony was meant to communicate the holiness of God and the sinfulness of men. The blood was representative of man’s guilt and condemnation. But it also stood for God’s willingness to provide substitutionary atonement for the debt men owed. He had a plan for dealing with the problem and it involved the sacrifice of another. And as the apostle points out, “God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT).

## Purified for His Presence

<sup>22</sup> “You shall also take the fat from the ram and the fat tail and the fat that covers the entrails, and the long lobe of the liver and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and the right thigh (for it is a ram of ordination), <sup>23</sup> and one loaf of bread and one cake of bread made with oil, and one wafer out of the basket of unleavened bread that is before the Lord. <sup>24</sup> You shall put all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and wave them for a wave offering before the Lord. <sup>25</sup> Then you shall take them from their hands and burn them on the altar on top of the burnt offering, as a pleasing aroma before the Lord. It is a food offering to the Lord.

<sup>26</sup> “You shall take the breast of the ram of Aaron’s ordination and wave it for a wave offering before the Lord, and it shall be your portion. <sup>27</sup> And you shall consecrate the breast of the wave offering that is waved and the thigh of the priests’ portion that is contributed from the ram of ordination, from what was Aaron’s and his sons’. <sup>28</sup> It shall be for Aaron and his sons as a perpetual due from the people of Israel, for it is a contribution. It shall be a contribution from the people of Israel from their peace offerings, their contribution to the Lord.

<sup>29</sup> “The holy garments of Aaron shall be for his sons after him; they shall be anointed in them and ordained in them. <sup>30</sup> The son who succeeds him as priest, who comes into the tent of meeting to minister in the Holy Place, shall wear them seven days.

<sup>31</sup> “You shall take the ram of ordination and boil its flesh in a holy place. <sup>32</sup> And Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket in the entrance of the tent of meeting. <sup>33</sup> They shall eat those things with which atonement was made at their ordination and consecration, but an outsider shall not eat of them, because they are holy. <sup>34</sup> And if any of the flesh for the ordination or of the bread remain until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy.

<sup>35</sup> “Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons, according to all that I have commanded you. Through seven days shall you ordain them, <sup>36</sup> and every day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement. Also you shall purify the altar, when you make atonement for it, and shall anoint it to consecrate it. <sup>37</sup> Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and consecrate it, and the altar shall be most holy. Whatever touches the altar shall become holy.

<sup>38</sup> “Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. <sup>39</sup> One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. <sup>40</sup> And with the first lamb a tenth measure of fine flour mingled with a fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and a fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering. <sup>41</sup> The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it a grain offering and its drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the Lord. <sup>42</sup> It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. <sup>43</sup> There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. <sup>44</sup> I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. <sup>45</sup> I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. <sup>46</sup> And they shall

*know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.” – Exodus 29:22-46 ESV*

God has revealed how Aaron and his sons were to be prepared for their roles as priests. They were to be washed, dressed, anointed, and atoned for, all before they could even enter the front gate of the Tabernacle complex. But even then, God mandated three separate sacrifices offered over a period of seven days to fully consecrate these men. By the time this elaborate ceremony was complete, Aaron and his sons would be drenched in oil and covered in blood, a sight that would have left an impression on all those who saw them.

*“They were washed with water. They were robed in righteousness. They were anointed with oil. They were sprinkled with blood. They were purified, sanctified, anointed, and justified, and in this way there were consecrated for the holy service of God. In a word, they were ordained.” – Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved For God’s Glory**

With this elaborate procedure completed, Aaron and his sons would be considered holy and officially ordained for service.

*“He and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons’ garments with him.” – Exodus 29:21 ESV*

What happened next is significant and should not be overlooked. God commanded that His newly consecrated priests make yet another offering that would complete their ordination.

*“...take the fat of the ram, including the fat of the broad tail, the fat around the internal organs, the long lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys and the fat around them, along with the right thigh. Then take one round loaf of bread, one thin cake mixed with olive oil, and one wafer from the basket of bread without yeast that was placed in the Lord’s presence. Put all these in the hands of Aaron and his sons to be lifted up as a special offering to the Lord.” – Exodus 29:22-24 NLT*

After the final lamb was sacrificed and dismembered, the fat, liver, kidneys, and right thigh were to be placed in the hands of Aaron and his sons, along with bread from the Table of Presence. This rather grotesque-sounding ceremony had a purpose. Placing these elements in the hands of the consecrated priests was a sign of ownership. The best parts of the animal were given to Aaron and his sons, but they were to offer them back to God as “a special gift for him” (Exodus 29:25 NLT). These elements were placed on the Bronze Altar and burned with fire, creating a pleasing aroma to God. This gift was given by Aaron and his sons, a sign of their commitment to give their best to God.

But God would reward them for their service. Aaron was allowed to keep the breast of the ordination ram, but only after lifting it up to God as a wave offering. In doing so, he acknowledged God’s ownership of all things, including himself and his sons. The breast of the ram was to be seen as a gracious gift from God. And Aaron’s sons would also receive a gift, in

the form of the thigh of the ordination ram. These gifts, originally given by the people, were to become a form of divine compensation for Aaron and his sons. God would take care of His servants by meeting their physical needs.

*“This was God’s permanent provision for the priesthood. The people brought their offerings to God, and God in turn gave the priests their share.” – Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved For God’s Glory**

These gifts from God were reserved solely for the priests. No one else was allowed to consume any part of the ordination ram or the bread of the presence.

*“Then Aaron and his sons will eat this meat, along with the bread in the basket, at the Tabernacle entrance. They alone may eat the meat and bread used for their purification in the ordination ceremony. No one else may eat them, for these things are set apart and holy.” – Exodus 29:32-33 NLT*

These men were to be considered completely holy. From their outer robes to the literal inner recesses of their bodies, they were fully consecrated to God. They were covered in robes of righteousness, anointed with the oil that represented the Spirit of God, sprinkled with blood that atoned for their sins, and filled with food from the table of God. There is tremendous symbolism in this ritual. It pictured the future consecration that would be experienced by all those who placed their faith in Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29 ESV).

Jesus would later describe the process by which someone could experience the transformation from a sinner to a priest of the Most High God.

*“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever.” – John 6:53-58 NLT*

And the apostle Peter provided further insight into this remarkable transformation.

*...you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.*

*“Once you had no identity as a people;  
now you are God’s people.*

*Once you received no mercy;  
now you have received God's mercy."* – 1 Peter 2:9-10 NLT

For a Christian, this process is immediate and permanent. It is a one-time event that never needs to be repeated. But for Aaron and his sons, the sanctifying process was to last seven days and required repeated sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people and to purify the altar of God. Sin would be a constant problem for the people of Israel and, therefore, the sacrifices would be an ongoing necessity.

*"These burnt offerings are to be made each day from generation to generation."* – Exodus 29:42 NLT

And the author of Hebrews explains the reason for this perpetual and never-ending cycle of sacrifice for sanctification.

*The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared.*

*But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.* – Hebrews 10:1-4 NLT

Then he adds the fantastic news regarding Jesus' once-for-all-time sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

*For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.*

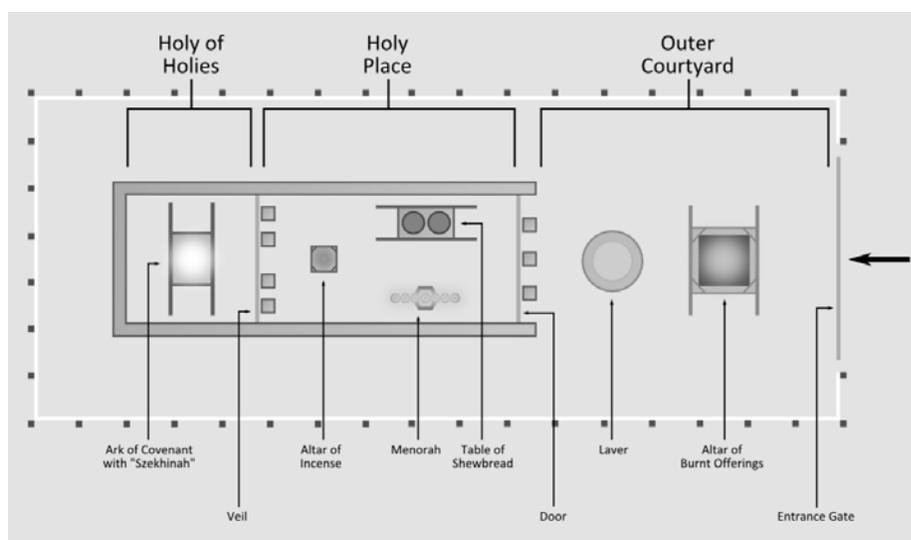
*Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand...* – Hebrews 10:10-12 NLT

Centuries ago, God made a provision for dealing with the sinfulness of His chosen people. In order that He might dwell in their midst, He provided an elaborate process for cleansing them from their sin and preparing them to enjoy the pleasure of His presence. His presence was predicated on their purification, and their purification was dependent upon the shedding of blood.

*"Yes, I will consecrate the Tabernacle and the altar, and I will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. Then I will live among the people of Israel and be their God, and they will know that I am the Lord their God."* – Exodus 29:44-46 NLT

## The Altar of Incense

<sup>1</sup> “You shall make an altar on which to burn incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. <sup>2</sup> A cubit shall be its length, and a cubit its breadth. It shall be square, and two cubits shall be its height. Its horns shall be of one piece with it. <sup>3</sup> You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and around its sides and its horns. And you shall make a molding of gold around it. <sup>4</sup> And you shall make two golden rings for it. Under its molding on two opposite sides of it you shall make them, and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it. <sup>5</sup> You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. <sup>6</sup> And you shall put it in front of the veil that is above the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is above the testimony, where I will meet with you. <sup>7</sup> And Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it. Every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall burn it, <sup>8</sup> and when Aaron sets up the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations. <sup>9</sup> You shall not offer unauthorized incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering, and you shall not pour a drink offering on it. <sup>10</sup> Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year. With the blood of the sin offering of atonement he shall make atonement for it once in the year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the Lord.” – Exodus 30:1-10 ESV



Back in chapter 25, God gave instructions regarding the primary pieces of furniture to be contained in the Tabernacle. He includes the Ark of the Covenant, the Mercy Seat, the table for the bread of the presence, and the Golden Lampstand. Each of these intricately designed pieces was to

be placed within the two inner chambers of the Tabernacle. But there was one item left off the list: The Altar of Incense. For some unexplained reason, God did not mention this piece until after He had outlined the ordination ceremony for the priests.

There has been much debate about this apparent “misplacement” of the altar’s description in the narrative. Some have argued that it provides proof that the book of Exodus was amended by outside editors. There is a long history among editorial critics of the Bible that the book of Exodus was not written by Moses but was compiled by a variety of authors and edited into its current form. But why would these editors have placed the design of the altar in chapter 30 rather than chapter 25? That makes no sense. If anything, the delayed introduction of the Altar

of Incense was perfectly timed by God Himself. He revealed it to Moses at just the right moment.



The Altar of Incense would be a vital part of the worship of Yahweh performed by Aaron and his sons. The placement of the Altar of Incense reveals the nature of its importance. It was to be located within the Holy Place just in front of the veil that led into the Holy of Holies. On the other side of that veil was the Mercy Seat, which was intended to be the throne of God on earth. It was there that His divine presence would reside. So, this small wooden box, covered in gold, was to be placed before the

entrance into God’s presence. God was very specific about its placement.

*“Place the incense altar just outside the inner curtain that shields the Ark of the Covenant, in front of the Ark’s cover—the place of atonement—that covers the tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant. I will meet with you there.” – Exodus 30:6 NLT*

The incense altar was to be flanked by the Golden Lampstand and the Table of Showbread. But only it led into the Holy of Holies. And God gave Moses strict instructions regarding its use.

*“Every morning when Aaron maintains the lamps, he must burn fragrant incense on the altar. And each evening when he lights the lamps, he must again burn incense in the Lord’s presence. This must be done from generation to generation. Do not offer any unholy incense on this altar, or any burnt offerings, grain offerings, or liquid offerings.” – Exodus 30:7-9 NLT*

This helps to explain the delayed description of this particular piece of furniture. Its use required the presence of a fully consecrated high priest. While the Golden Lampstand and the Table of Showbread also required the services of the high priest, the Altar of Incense was different. Its entire purpose was for burning incense before the Lord, and this ritual was to be performed twice a day for perpetuity. God even provided Moses with the recipe for making the incense.

*“Gather fragrant spices—resin droplets, mollusk shell, and galbanum—and mix these fragrant spices with pure frankincense, weighed out in equal amounts. Using the usual techniques of the incense maker, blend the spices together and sprinkle them with salt to produce a pure and holy incense. Grind some of the mixture into a very fine powder and*

*put it in front of the Ark of the Covenant, where I will meet with you in the Tabernacle. You must treat this incense as most holy. Never use this formula to make this incense for yourselves. It is reserved for the Lord, and you must treat it as holy. Anyone who makes incense like this for personal use will be cut off from the community.” – Exodus 30:34-38 NLT*

Even the spice itself was set apart for God’s use. Its proprietary formula was reserved solely for the worship of God, and Aaron and his sons were prohibited from replicating it for personal use. So, every morning and evening, Aaron would enter the Holy Place dressed in his priestly robes and offer up the incense to God.

According to the book of Leviticus, Aaron was only to use coals from the Bronze Altar to burn incense before the Lord.

*“Aaron will present his own bull as a sin offering to purify himself and his family, making them right with the Lord. After he has slaughtered the bull as a sin offering, he will fill an incense burner with burning coals from the altar that stands before the Lord. Then he will take two handfuls of fragrant powdered incense and will carry the burner and the incense behind the inner curtain. There in the Lord’s presence he will put the incense on the burning coals so that a cloud of incense will rise over the Ark’s cover—the place of atonement—that rests on the Ark of the Covenant. If he follows these instructions, he will not die.” – Leviticus 16:11-13 NLT*

God stressed the importance that Aaron use the Altar of Incense properly by threatening him with the possibility of death for any breach of protocol. And the book of Leviticus tells us that Aaron’s two sons, Nadab and Abihu chose to violate God’s commands and lost their lives in the process.

*...each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. – Leviticus 10:1-2 ESV*

It seems that rather than using coals from the Bronze Altar as God had commanded, they chose a different source. In doing so, the smoke from the incense became unacceptable to God, and they paid for this violation with their lives.

There is no explanation given regarding the real purpose behind the burning of the incense, but elsewhere in the Scriptures, it is tied to prayer. King David would write in one of his psalms:

*O Lord, I am calling to you. Please hurry!  
Listen when I cry to you for help!  
Accept my prayer as incense offered to you,  
and my upraised hands as an evening offering. – Psalm 141:2 NLT*

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John records his vision of the throne room of God in heaven.

*...the four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people. – Revelation 5:8 NLT*

*Then another angel with a gold incense burner came and stood at the altar. And a great amount of incense was given to him to mix with the prayers of God's people as an offering on the gold altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers of God's holy people, ascended up to God from the altar where the angel had poured them out. – Revelation 8:3-4 NLT*

So, as Aaron offered up incense each morning and evening, it represented the prayers of God's people. Dressed in his sacred and sanctified robes, the high priest took coals from the Bronze Altar and lit the holy incense before the veil that led into God's presence. The smoke, symbolizing the prayers of the people, would rise before God, whose divine presence resided on the Mercy Seat. This scene, repeated every day, twice a day, would foreshadow the role of the Holy Spirit after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

*And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. – Romans 8:26-27 NLT*

God desires to intercede on behalf of His people. He hears and responds to their prayers. And, in offering up incense, Aaron would be symbolically presenting the desires of the people before the throne of God.

Centuries later, when Solomon dedicated the newly built temple in Jerusalem, God placed His seal of approval on it and made a solemn promise to hear and answer the prayers of His people.

*"...if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place." – 2 Chronicles 7:14-15 ESV*

The key to understanding this passage is the issue of holiness. God expected His people to live holy lives. He gave the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant so that they might know exactly how to conduct themselves as His chosen people. The entire Tabernacle was built upon the foundation of holiness. Every aspect of its design and every facet of its functionality was tied to holiness. Everything, including the priest and his garments, had to be purified and

sanctified so that God could be worshiped properly. There was no room for error. The prayers of the people had to be offered in the right way if they wanted to hear from God. And even the Altar of Incense itself had to be purified annually so that the holy incense and the prayers of the people would rise before God as a pleasing aroma. There were to be no shortcuts. No concessions or compromises were allowed. Holiness was and still is the only acceptable standard.



## The Census

<sup>11</sup> The Lord said to Moses, <sup>12</sup> “When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the Lord when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them. <sup>13</sup> Each one who is numbered in the census shall give this: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as an offering to the Lord. <sup>14</sup> Everyone who is numbered in the census, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the Lord’s offering. <sup>15</sup> The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when you give the Lord’s offering to make atonement for your lives. <sup>16</sup> You shall take the atonement money from the people of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may bring the people of Israel to remembrance before the Lord, so as to make atonement for your lives.” – Exodus 30:11-16 ESV

The Tabernacle, like any other man-made structure, was going to require ongoing maintenance and upkeep. Over the next 500 years of use, its carefully crafted timbers, veils, furnishings, and gold-covered fixtures would need repairs and replacement. Its construction had been funded by donations from the people of Israel but to cover the cost of its maintenance, God required a tax be collected from every male who was at least 20 years old. To determine the number of eligible males, God ordered Moses to take a census or literally, a head count of the people.

According to the book of Numbers, this census was not taken until ten months later. The most likely reason for the delay was that the census was not necessary until the construction of the Tabernacle was complete.

*The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, “Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, by clans, by fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male, head by head. From twenty years old and upward, all in Israel who are able to go to war, you and Aaron shall list them, company by company.”* – Numbers 1:1-3 ESV

The completed census revealed a total of 603,550 male Israelites 20 years old or older. But that number did not include any men from the tribe of Levi because God had ordered their exclusion from the census.

*“Do not include the tribe of Levi in the registration; do not count them with the rest of the Israelites. Put the Levites in charge of the Tabernacle of the Covenant, along with all its furnishings and equipment. They must carry the Tabernacle and all its furnishings as you travel, and they must take care of it and camp around it. Whenever it is time for the Tabernacle to move, the Levites will take it down. And when it is time to stop, they will set it up again.”* – Numbers 1:49-51 NLT

These 603,550 male members of the Israelite community were ordered to pay a tax that would be used to cover the cost of maintaining God's house. But there was a more important purpose behind this levy.

*"...each shall give a ransom for his life to the Lord when you number them."* – Exodus 30:12 ESV

The dual purpose behind the tax is clarified in verse 16.

*"You shall take the atonement money from the people of Israel and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may bring the people of Israel to remembrance before the Lord, so as to make atonement for your lives."* – Exodus 30:16 ESV

This half-shekel tax was to be considered an offering to the Lord but it was to also function as a reminder to each Israelite of their status as God's people. The Hebrew word translated as "ransom" is כֹּפֶר (*kōp̄er*) and it means "price of a life" or "redemption price." This so-called tax was actually a payment made by each Israelite male to signify that their lives belonged to God. This payment did not atone for their sins because that was only possible through blood sacrifice. But it let every Israelite know that their lives were not their own. He had redeemed or purchased them out of slavery in Egypt and made them His own people.

The apostle Paul picks up on this idea in his first letter to the believers in Corinth.

*Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? **You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price.** So you must honor God with your body.* – 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 NLT

The "atonement money" did not atone for sins, but it made atonement for their lives. And not only that, it served as a form of protection from God's wrath.

*"...each shall give a ransom for his life to the Lord when you number them, that there be no plague among them when you number them."* – Exodus 30:12 ESV

God warns Moses that the taking of the census could prove to be a dangerous proposition. Numbering the people could lead the Israelites to develop a sense of self-sufficiency and independence from God. When they discovered that they had more than 600,000 men of fighting age, they might be tempted to become overconfident and reliant upon their own strength.

*"When God numbers or orders anything to be numbered, taking the sum of them denotes that they belong to Him, and that He has the sovereign right to do with them as He pleases. The action itself says of the things numbered, 'These are Mine, and I assign them their place as I will.'" – A. W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus**

God had promised to make of Abraham a great nation, and He had kept that promise. When the family of Jacob had entered Egypt there had only been 70 of them. But some four centuries later, their number had exploded.

*...the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. – Exodus 1:7 ESV*

And when the ten plagues from God finally forced the Egyptians to release the Israelites, they marched out like a mighty army.

*...the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. – Exodus 12:37 ESV*

This had all been God's doing. Their exponential growth and miraculous release from captivity had been the work of Yahweh and they could not claim any credit for it. So, when the census was taken, they were not to marvel at their own might or become prideful of their capacity for self-rule. They belonged to God.

One of the keys to understanding all of this is to recognize that God ordered the census to record the number of fighting men. These were to be able-bodied male Israelites who could march into battle against the enemies who occupied the land of Canaan. But God wanted the Israelites to know that their vast numbers were not to be their hope. Years later, when the people were standing on the edge of the Jordan River preparing to enter the Promised Land for the very first time, Moses would remind them:

*“The Lord your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.” – Deuteronomy 1:30-31 ESV*

Each time the Israelites prepared to go into battle, the priests were to gather all the fighting men and tell them, “Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, for the Lord your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory” (Deuteronomy 20:3-4 ESV).

The book of 2 Samuel records a much-later event when King David took a census of the people of Israel. While he had been prompted to do so by God, it was meant as a punishment against the people for their wickedness. And David's general, Joab, recognized the nature of this test from the Lord.

*“May the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king still see it, but why does my lord the king delight in this thing?” – 2 Samuel 24:3 ESV*

But David went ahead with the census, and nine months and 20 days later, he received the good news.

*Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to the king: in Israel there were 800,000 valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were 500,000. – 2 Samuel 24:9 ESV*

But David regretted his decision and immediately confessed his sin to God.

*“I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.” – 2 Samuel 24:10 ESV*

He had wanted to know the size of his army, and when he had learned that there were 1,300,000 soldiers under his command, he knew he had made a drastic mistake. He probably recognized the pride he felt upon learning of his massive military might. A sense of arrogance and self-sufficiency must have welled up within him as he considered the size of his army. But then he realized that he was putting his faith in the wrong thing. He had taken his eyes off of the Lord. And while David received forgiveness from God, he still had to pay for his costly error.

*...the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men. – 2 Samuel 24:15 ESV*

To assuage the anger of God, David used his own money to purchase a piece of land where he commissioned the construction of an altar to God. He paid 50 shekels of silver for the land and 50 oxen, which he sacrificed on the altar. And as a result of this costly gesture, God relented.

*...the Lord responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel. – 2 Samuel 24:25 ESV*

David had placed a higher priority on the size of his army than the power of His God. For just a moment, he had taken his eyes off of the Lord and focused his hopes on the wrong thing. And God wanted Moses to protect Moses from making that same mistake. The number of able-bodied men who could take up swords against the enemy was to remind Moses and the people of Israel of God’s greatness, not their own. The census was really designed to glorify Israel’s God of Israel and not its army. And the tax was a reminder that the life of each of these men belonged to God. They were, first and foremost, an army of priests, a holy nation unto the Lord.

## Purity and Peculiarity

<sup>17</sup> The Lord said to Moses, <sup>18</sup> “You shall also make a basin of bronze, with its stand of bronze, for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it, <sup>19</sup> with which Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. <sup>20</sup> When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn a food offering to the Lord, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. <sup>21</sup> They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die. It shall be a statute forever to them, even to him and to his offspring throughout their generations.”

<sup>22</sup> The Lord said to Moses, <sup>23</sup> “Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh 500 shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, 250, and 250 of aromatic cane, <sup>24</sup> and 500 of cassia, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and a hin of olive oil. <sup>25</sup> And you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil. <sup>26</sup> With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, <sup>27</sup> and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, <sup>28</sup> and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils and the basin and its stand. <sup>29</sup> You shall consecrate them, that they may be most holy. Whatever touches them will become holy. <sup>30</sup> You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may serve me as priests. <sup>31</sup> And you shall say to the people of Israel, ‘This shall be my holy anointing oil throughout your generations. <sup>32</sup> It shall not be poured on the body of an ordinary person, and you shall make no other like it in composition. It is holy, and it shall be holy to you. <sup>33</sup> Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on an outsider shall be cut off from his people.’”

<sup>34</sup> The Lord said to Moses, “Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (of each shall there be an equal part), <sup>35</sup> and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy. <sup>36</sup> You shall beat some of it very small, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you. It shall be most holy for you. <sup>37</sup> And the incense that you shall make according to its composition, you shall not make for yourselves. It shall be for you holy to the Lord. <sup>38</sup> Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from his people.” – Exodus 30:17-38 ESV

Holiness seems to be the theme of these closing verses of chapter 30.

“...it shall be a **holy** anointing oil...” – vs 25

“You shall consecrate them, that they may be most **holy**.” – vs 30

“Whatever touches them will become **holy**.” – vs 30

“This shall be my **holy** anointing oil throughout your generations.” – vs 31

“It is holy, and it shall be **holy** to you.” – vs 32

*“...make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and **holy**.” – vs 35*

*“It shall be most **holy** for you.” – vs 36*

*“It shall be for you **holy** to the Lord.” – vs 37*

The Hebrew word translated as “holy” is *קֹדֶשׁ* (*qōdeš*) and it refers to something as being “sacred,” “separate,” or “set apart.” Even the oil and incense used in the Tabernacle were to be distinctively different and set apart solely for God’s use. There was to be nothing ordinary or pedestrian about God’s house, His priests, or the rites and rituals performed within it. Purity and peculiarity were essential requirements for the worship of God. Yahweh would not dwell in just any tent. His abode had to reflect His glory and grandeur. And His priests, while ordinary men, must be clothed in garments that matched the magnitude of their calling. When performing their priestly duties, they were to be dressed in clothes of unparalleled beauty and anointed with a costly oil made from a proprietary blend of myrrh, sweet-smelling cinnamon, aromatic cane, cassia, and olive oil.



Their hands and feet were to be washed in the special bronze basin that was located between the altar of sacrifice and the veil that led into the Holy Place. For Aaron and his sons, the old adage, “cleanliness is next to godliness” was especially true because God had warned, “They must wash with water whenever they go into the Tabernacle to appear before the Lord and when they approach the altar to burn up their special gifts to the Lord—or they will die!” (Exodus

30:20 NLT). They were forbidden to even draw near God’s presence in an unclean state. This ritual too, had to do with holiness or set-apartness. Their cleansing at the basin did not completely rid them of all dirt and grime, but it symbolized their need for purification before they could access a holy and righteous God.

This basin was strategically located at the door of the Tabernacle as a visual reminder to Aaron and his sons that their personal purity was essential. One must keep in mind that the basin was the very first stop after the priests had slaughtered and sacrificed animals on the bronze altar. Their hands and feet would have been covered in blood, requiring them to cleanse themselves before they could pass through the veil into the Holy Place.

It was King David who later wrote:

*Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?  
And who shall stand in his holy place?  
He who has clean hands and a pure heart... – Psalm 24:3-4 ESV*

The practice of ritual cleansing was meant as a constant reminder to the priests that their personal purity was important to God. His holiness was to be honored at all times, and His perfect righteousness was never to be treated lightly or flippantly. To do so would bring the penalty of death.

It's interesting to note that God set apart Aaron and his sons to serve as priests in the Tabernacle. They were chosen by God for this distinguished honor. But their set-apart status was not enough. They needed the proper clothing to wear. They needed blood sacrifices to atone for their sins and make possible their forgiveness. They required anointing with oil to signify their status as God's chosen servants. Then they needed to be covered in the sweet-smelling blend of olive oil and spices to mask even the smallest hint of unacceptable odor that might offend a holy God. This whole process speaks of their ongoing need for sanctification. Not one step was to be left out. Every phase of the process was essential in preparing them to serve God Almighty.

The aromatic blend of olive oil and expensive spices was not just reserved for Aaron and his sons. It was also to be used "to anoint the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and all its accessories, the incense altar, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the washbasin with its stand" (Exodus 30:26-28 NLT).

This process rendered all the items as holy or set apart to God. And God states that anyone or anything that came into contact with those very same items would be considered holy as well. This is not to say that holiness is contagious or transferable, but that holiness is mandatory. Verse 29 seems to indicate that only those who have been anointed with the holy oil could touch the pieces located within the Tabernacle. No other person, no matter their pedigree or social status, was allowed to enter the Holy Place or touch any of the furniture found within it. Holiness was required.

And God warns that the oil belongs to Him, not Aaron and his sons. It was made for His benefit. The sweet aroma it gave off was for His enjoyment. That meant that no one was to replicate it or use it for any other purpose.

*"It must never be used to anoint anyone else, and you must never make any blend like it for yourselves. It is holy, and you must treat it as holy. Anyone who makes a blend like it or anoints someone other than a priest will be cut off from the community." – Exodus 30:32-33 NLT*

Violation of this command would result in expulsion from the community of Israel. Some rabbinical scholars speculate that the penalty actually involved physical death. To be "cut off" meant to be permanently eliminated by means of execution. But whether the penalty involved

ex-communication or execution, it would prove to be a costly mistake to violate God's command.

The same penalty was reserved for any misuse of the incense that was to be placed before the Ark of the Covenant. This special blend of spices was also set apart solely for God's use. It was to be considered as holy or sacred, and never to be replicated or repurposed for any other use.

*“Never use this formula to make this incense for yourselves. It is reserved for the Lord, and you must treat it as holy. Anyone who makes incense like this for personal use will be cut off from the community.” – Exodus 30:37-38 NLT*

The Tabernacle did not belong to the people of Israel. It was God's possession just as they were. And everything associated with the Tabernacle was to be set apart for His use and for His glory. From the anointing oil and incense to the priestly robes and particular pieces of furniture that filled the inner recesses of the Tabernacle, it all belonged to the Lord. The holiness of these items was not tied to the actual composition of the oil and spice blend. What rendered them holy was God's selection of them as His own. The oil was nothing more than a ceremonial reminder of their set-apart status. God wanted His people to know that His choice of them had rendered them holy. They were His prized possession, and He expected them to demonstrate that reality in their everyday lives. The Tabernacle was meant to be a visual reminder to God's people of what it means to be holy and set apart. Cleanliness, purity, distinctiveness, and total dedication were required of the Tabernacle and of His people. They were to keep themselves pure and undefiled in all their ways. As the psalmist wrote years later:

*Blessed are those whose way is blameless,  
who walk in the law of the Lord!  
Blessed are those who keep his testimonies,  
who seek him with their whole heart,  
who also do no wrong,  
but walk in his ways! – Psalm 119:1-3 ESV*

## God's House Built God's Way

<sup>1</sup> The Lord said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, <sup>3</sup> and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, <sup>4</sup> to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, <sup>5</sup> in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. <sup>6</sup> And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: <sup>7</sup> the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, <sup>8</sup> the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, <sup>9</sup> and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin and its stand, <sup>10</sup> and the finely worked garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, for their service as priests, <sup>11</sup> and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the Holy Place. According to all that I have commanded you, they shall do." – Exodus 31:1-11 ESV

The Tabernacle and its furnishings had been designed by God but were to be handcrafted by men. For an earthly house for God to go from concept to concrete form, human hands would be required. Up until this point in the narrative, the Tabernacle was just an idea with no basis in reality. None of its furnishings had been fabricated. The curtains and veils had not been sewn. The timber for its beams had not been harvested or milled. Even the bronze, silver, and gold that would adorn the Tabernacle had not been collected, let alone smelted and purified for use.

There was much to be done, but before Moses could begin the process of enlisting workers and making assignments, God revealed the names of the two men who were to oversee the construction of His house. While Moses had been assigned the task of recording God's plans for the Tabernacle, he would not be in charge of its construction. That responsibility would fall to two men who had been specially chosen by God: Bezalel and Oholiab.

It's clear from God's instructions, that the construction of the Tabernacle would require great skill and craftsmanship. This was to be no ordinary structure and its fabrication would involve a wide range of disciplines, including stone masonry, metallurgy, weaving, engraving, carpentry, embroidery, and tanning. To our knowledge, Moses had none of these skills and knew nothing about managing a massive construction project of this nature. While he had grown up in Pharaoh's court and was intimately familiar with fine furnishing and opulent surroundings, nothing on his resume would have suggested that he was the man to build God's house. He was a prophet with 40 years of shepherding experience.

But God's plans for the Tabernacle included the men who would oversee its construction. They had been there all along. When Bezalel and Oholiab had walked out of Egypt along with the rest of the people of Israel, no one had any idea that they were to become two of the most important men in the entire nation, including themselves. They were just two more Israelites making their way to the land of Canaan along with their friends and family members. But God

had plans for them. And God had equipped both of them for their future roles as His construction foremen.

*“Look, I have specifically chosen Bezalel son of Uri, grandson of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God, giving him great wisdom, ability, and expertise in all kinds of crafts. He is a master craftsman, expert in working with gold, silver, and bronze. He is skilled in engraving and mounting gemstones and in carving wood. He is a master at every craft!” – Exodus 31:2-5 NLT*

Bezalel was a highly gifted man with expertise in a wide range of disciplines. He was an artisan and craftsman with extraordinary talents and abilities that set him apart from his peers. But God makes it clear that Bezalel’s gifts were divinely ordained. This man had been prepared for this very moment by the Spirit of God. We are not given any information regarding Bezalel’s previous construction experience or how he made his living in Egypt. Perhaps he put some of his diverse skills to work on the many building projects that Pharaoh forced the Israelites to complete. But, according to God, Bezalel was born for this moment. His true purpose in life had been to oversee the construction of God’s house.

And even his name suggests the future role that God had for him. Bezalel means “in the shadow (i.e. protection) of God.” This man had been sovereignly prepared and preserved by God for this moment in time. He didn’t just “happen” to be in the crowd that day. He hadn’t submitted his resume to Moses along with a host of other candidates. It’s likely that Moses didn’t even know Bezalel existed. But God did. And God had providentially equipped Bezalel with “ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship” (Exodus 31:3 ESV).

These words reveal that Bezalel’s expertise was divinely inspired. He had been given a supernatural endowment that enhanced his natural skills and abilities. This Spirit-empowered ability was going to allow him to take God’s design and bring it to fruition. The details that Moses had recorded would need to be interpreted and interpolated before they could become reality. Bezalel was not handed detailed blueprints and a lengthy list of design criteria. Much of the Tabernacle’s construction would be left to his Spirit-enabled imagination. Even artists who have tried to illustrate the Tabernacle based on the details found in Exodus have found it difficult to discern the exact nature of its final form.

But with the Spirit’s help, Bezalel would have the wisdom necessary to discern and carry out every detail of God’s plan. This was going to be a project of massive proportions that would require spiritual insight and practical skills. And Bezalel was just the man for the task. But he would not be alone. God had also chosen an assistant to serve alongside Bezalel.

*“I have personally appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to be his assistant. Moreover, I have given special skill to all the gifted craftsmen so they can make all the things I have commanded you to make.” – Exodus 31:6 NLT*

Oholiab was to be Bezalel's foreman, overseeing a team of "gifted craftsmen" who had each been divinely selected and equipped for their roles.

"The artistic gifts these men possessed all came from God. To be specific, they came from God the Holy Spirit. Presumably Bezalel and Oholiab already had some natural talent for the arts and crafts (which also came from God). However, they were being given a special commission, and with that commission came special gifts. They alone were called to build God's holy tabernacle, and in order to do this work they were inspired in the true sense of the word: They were filled with the Holy Spirit." – Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved For God's Glory*

This was not a Habitat for Humanity building project where everyone grabbed a hammer and started pounding nails. This entire project could have become an unorganized mess had not God preordained the very men who would oversee its implementation and completion. And it should not be surprising that God had a well-thought-out plan in place for carrying out the construction of His house. He had left nothing to chance but, instead, He had preselected and supernaturally prepared those who would carry out the plans for the Tabernacle's construction.

Every single item that God described to Moses was to be made by these men. That means that there was a wide range of talents represented among them. Some of them, like Bezalel, were multi-talented and capable of contributing in a variety of ways. Others were experts in a particular field and assigned a single task to complete. There were those who did menial tasks such as chopping down the trees to make the support beams for the Tabernacle. Others slaughtered the goats and rams, then tanned their hides to make the outer lining for the Tabernacle's roof. Some worked with precious gems and metals. There were those who sewed and weaved the curtains, while another group built the furniture that would fill God's house. It was truly a team effort that required constant oversight and careful attention to detail. Nothing was to be overlooked. There was to be no skimping or cutting of corners. Attention to detail was paramount and mistakes would not be tolerated. After all, every facet of this vast project would ultimately form the dwelling place of God Almighty.

The Tabernacle was God's idea, and so was the manner of its construction. He left nothing to chance. He had raised up the men who would build the Tabernacle long before He gave the plans for its design to Moses. Even before He had called Moses to deliver His people from their captivity in Egypt, God had sovereignly ordained those who would build His house. And according to King David, God had these men and their future roles in mind before they were even born.

*You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body  
and knit me together in my mother's womb.  
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!  
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.  
You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,  
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.  
You saw me before I was born.*

*Every day of my life was recorded in your book.  
Every moment was laid out  
before a single day had passed. – Psalm 139:13-16 NLT*

Every individual who played a part in the building of God's house was chosen for their role. Not only that, they were divinely equipped to contribute their part to the overall project. There was no skill missing. Not one part of the Tabernacle's construction was left unaccounted for. At no point did Bezalel or Oholiel run out of materials or skilled workers. No one was forced to work outside their competency. God provided all they needed. And the apostle Paul reminds us that God has called and equipped another group of individuals to whom He has assigned another important task, the building of His Church.

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. – Ephesians 2:10 ESV*

God has chosen us and equipped us for service, just as He did with Bezalel and Oholiel, and Paul goes on to describe the purpose behind God's supernatural endowment of His people.

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. – Ephesians 4:11-13  
ESV*

God's house built God's way and all for God's glory.

## Getting to Know God

<sup>12</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, <sup>13</sup> “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. <sup>14</sup> You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. <sup>15</sup> Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. <sup>16</sup> Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. <sup>17</sup> It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.’”

<sup>18</sup> And he gave to Moses, when he had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. – Exodus 31:12-18 ESV

It should be clear by now that God places a high priority on the observance of the Sabbath. He first introduced this holy day of rest when He gave the people manna in the wilderness. In response to their grumbling about the lack of food, God provided them with manna from heaven.

*“This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.’” – Exodus 16:23 ESV*

*Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.” – Exodus 16-24-25 ESV*

The priority of the Sabbath had been established long before Israel arrived at Sinai and Moses had received the Ten Commandments. But God restated this holy observance when He gave the Decalogue to Moses.

*“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” – Exodus 20:8-11 ESV*

Now, after a lengthy conversation with Moses on top of Mount Sinai, God gave His servant two tablets of stone on which He had inscribed the Ten Commandments with His own finger (Exodus 31:18). And then, in an obvious attempt to emphasize the importance of the Sabbath observance, God verbally restated its requirements to Moses.

*“Tell the people of Israel: ‘Be careful to keep my Sabbath day, for the Sabbath is a sign of the covenant between me and you from generation to generation. It is given so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy. You must keep the Sabbath day, for it is a holy day for you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; anyone who works on that day will be cut off from the community.’” – Exodus 31:13-14 NLT*

Moses was about to descend back down to the valley with the tablets written by the hand of God and his own handwritten copy of the Book of the Covenant. He was to share all of this with the people of Israel but the one command that God highlighted was that concerning the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was more than just a command; it was to be a permanent sign of the covenant between God and His people.

*“It is a permanent sign of my covenant with the people of Israel. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day he stopped working and was refreshed.” – Exodus 31:17 NLT*

This weekly observance was designed to be a reminder of their unique relationship with their Creator-God. The purpose of the Tabernacle was to house the presence of God. That meant that the One who created the heavens and earth was going to dwell in their midst. When God had completed His creation of the universe and all it contains, He rested. He ceased from His labors because he had finished what He had set out to do. And by observing the Sabbath each week, the Israelites would be commemorating and sanctifying that one-of-a-kind day in history. Their great God had made all that their eyes could see and yet, He had chosen to dwell among them. Not only that, He had made a covenant with them – to be their God and to give them the privilege of being His chosen people. This covenant between God and the people of Israel was revealed to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai when he received his divine commission.

*“Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. **I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God**, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians...’” – Exodus 6:6-7 ESV*

But that was not the first time God had spoken of the covenant. When Abraham, the patriarch of the people of Israel, had been chosen by God, he had received a similar promise concerning his future descendants.

*“And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.” – Genesis 17:7 ESV*

Now, centuries later, that promise had been fulfilled. The people of Israel were the offspring of Abraham and God was making His covenant a permanent reality. The Tabernacle was designed to be the house of God so that the people might enjoy the blessing of His presence among them. But God did not need a place to stay; He wanted a people who desired a relationship with Him. The Sabbath was designed to be a day when the people made God their highest priority. Rather than working, they were to put all their energy toward knowing and serving God. He was to be their highest priority and greatest good.

The emphasis on rest has less to do with physical cessation from work than it does with the idea of reliance upon and trust in God for all their needs. With the Tabernacle, they would have a place to seek and find God. Located in the middle of their camp, this special structure would house God's divine presence and assure His people that they were never alone. They had nothing to fear, except the holiness of their God, which is why God reiterates their need to observe the Sabbath or suffer the consequences.

*"Anyone who works on the Sabbath must be put to death."* – Exodus 31:16 NLT

"This penalty seems harsh, but not when we realize what the Sabbath was intended to do. By not keeping the Sabbath, the Israelite was showing that he or she was not interested in knowing God." – Peter Enns, *Exodus*

To work on the Sabbath was to exhibit a distrust in God's presence and provision. It would be taken as a visual statement of self-sufficiency and a lack of reliance upon God's word. That one day had been set aside by God and was intended to be a time when the people of Israel sought Him above all else. If you were working, you weren't relying. If you were busy doing other things, you would have no time to set your mind on knowing the very One who created the heavens and the earth.

God knew His people well. When they heard Moses articulate the design of the Tabernacle, they would immediately want to begin the process of its construction. But God knew that, in their enthusiasm to build His house, they would run the risk of violating the Sabbath. Under the direction of Bezalel and Oholiab, and in the hopes of completing the Tabernacle in record time, they would attempt to work a seven-day week and violate God's command. In their effort to build a house for God, they would neglect to take time to know God.

It is so important to remember that everything about the Tabernacle was intended to point back to the glory, greatness, holiness, majesty, and power of God. That structure in the wilderness was meant to be a constant reminder to the people of Israel about the wonder and awesomeness of the God who had chosen to have a relationship with Him. It sat in the middle of their camp for a reason. Among a sea of drab-looking tents, the Tabernacle would stand out and make a powerful statement about the transcendence of God. He was like no other. He was both attractive and awe-inspiring. He was accessible but also off-limits. He was approachable but so holy that entrance into His presence required purification and atonement.

The Tabernacle was meant to declare the glory of God. The Sabbath was intended to as a day to focus one's attention on that reality. Rather than working, the people of Israel were to spend their time worshiping the One who had made them His chosen possession. Instead of meeting their own needs, they were to meet with the One who had rescued and redeemed them from their captivity in Egypt. He had chosen them and had promised to live among them, but now He expected them to seek to know and worship Him – “throughout their generations, as a covenant forever” (Exodus 31:16 ESV).