

# EXODUS 25–31

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## FINDING CHRIST IN THE TABERNACLE

### **Exodus 25:1–2**

After Moses received the law on Mount Sinai, he obtained a command to build a portable sanctuary, or tabernacle. The construction of this tabernacle is described in Exodus 25–31, with the actual construction in chapters 35–39 and the consecration, or dedication, of the structure in chapter 40. A total of thirteen chapters in Exodus are devoted to the tabernacle structure (or almost one third of the total chapters for the book).

We often tend to gloss over these chapters. Yet, if the Lord felt two chapters sufficed to describe the creation of the world, our attention should be piqued when God uses thirteen chapters in Exodus to describe the construction of the tabernacle.

One author calculated that a total of fifty chapters in the Bible discuss the construction or services of the tabernacle, again showing the significance of this holy structure.<sup>1</sup> As we look for Christ in the Old Testament, one of the greatest types and shadows of the Savior can be found in these fifty chapters devoted to the Old Testament temple/tabernacle. A powerful way to both prepare for and better understand modern temples is to study the ancient Israelite tabernacle and ancient temples. Learning about the tabernacle will help us better understand our own temple worship. As we study these chapters about the ancient tabernacle, we will see how Christ-centered the services of this holy structure are.

The command to build the tabernacle included the requirement to build it by the offering of the people given “willingly with [their] heart[s].” Some modern readers criticize the ancient Israelites for their disobedience and other failings; however, this is one command they fulfilled to overflowing. Exodus 36:5–7

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<sup>1</sup> C. W. Slemming, *Made According to Pattern* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2018), 13.

describes how the people contributed so much to the building of the tabernacle that the craftsmen asked Moses to turn the people away. Say what we want about the ancient Israelites and their murmuring desire to turn back to Egypt, when it came to their tabernacle offerings to God, they gave their all.

As a note to the reader, because much of the content of Exodus 25–31 parallels (at times even almost replicates word for word) Exodus 35–40, I will either duplicate or give very similar commentary in both sections. While it can be beneficial to read both how the Lord described the tabernacle (25–31) and how the people then fulfilled the command (35–40), most readers will just read one of these two sections.

### **Exodus 25:3–7**

The Lord requested that Israel gather offerings to help build the tabernacle. The various items were listed in descending order of value. Gold was the costliest and is often seen as a symbol of divinity, royalty, and wealth. Silver was second in value, symbolizing redemption. Brass (or more likely bronze), the final type of metal, was often associated with judgment.<sup>2</sup>

Like the metals, the colors of fabric were listed in order of descending value. Blue was often seen as connected with the sky, symbolizing a connection to heaven. Purple symbolized royalty or nobility. Both purple and blue dyes were created from the mucus secretion of murex sea snails. The most common form of extracting the dye from the snail was to crush the snail and remove its small mucus sack. One scholar noted that 12,000 snails would need to be killed in order to produce 1.4 grams of dye, which is only enough to color the trim of one single garment.<sup>3</sup> Red dye often came from the *Kermococcus vermilis* insect. Obviously, a massive amount of dye would be required for building the tabernacle, adding to the cost and sacrifice required of the people.

The fine linen likely refers to the costly and beautiful fabric worn by the Egyptian elite. The goats' hair refers to the hair spun into thread and loomed into a coarse black fabric used for making tents. The rams' skins were likely either dyed or painted. The “badgers' skin” is better translated as just some sort of durable leather, as the original Hebrew word has been lost over the centuries. Shittim wood (better translated as “acacia”) is a hardy wood that is very resistant to rot and decay. The oil, spices, incense, and stones for the clothing of the high priest will be discussed in later sections.

All in all, this is an impressive list of very costly materials. Though we won't cover the possible symbolism at this point, each of these has potential connections to the Savior and His sacrifice.

(Compare Exodus 35:5–9.)

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<sup>2</sup> Alonzo L. Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003), 90–93, 102–103.

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in William H. C. Propp, *The Anchor Bible: Exodus 19–40* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006), 373.

## **Exodus 25:8–9**

The word *tabernacle* means “residence, or dwelling place.” In John 1:14 we read, in reference to Christ, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us”—the original Greek meaning, in essence, that He “tabernacled among us.” Though we will discuss this later in more depth, it is significant that part of the tabernacle was made from the woven goat hair fabric used for tents for the everyday people. In essence, the Lord showed that He too dwelt in His own tent among His people. What better symbol to show that at His birth, Christ would take upon Him flesh and tabernacle among us “that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities”? (Alma 7:12).

The Lord revealed here that the Israelites were to follow the prescribed “pattern” to build the structure. It was not the design of men, but of the Lord. This is critical in our understanding that each aspect of the law, and even the construction of the tabernacle, was by design. Why? Because it was meant to point the people to Christ.

When reading of the Anti-Nephi-Lehites in the Book of Mormon, we learn that they “did keep the law of Moses; for it was expedient that they should keep the law of Moses as yet, for it was not all fulfilled. But notwithstanding the law of Moses, they did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses was a type of his coming, and believing that they must keep those outward performances until the time that he should be revealed unto them.” (Alma 25:15). Though they did obey the law, it was their understanding of how the law pointed to Christ that set them apart. Obedience was not to rote rules but to a law that taught them of the coming Messiah.

## **Exodus 25:10–11**

As with the types of metal, fabrics, and even the five types of sacrifices (see Leviticus 1–5) the Lord started with the most important and worked down. He started with the most sacred aspect of the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies (Exodus 25:10–22), and then worked out to the least sacred, the altar of sacrifice in the outer courtyard (Exodus 27:1–8). The Lord follows this pattern often in teaching us. He does not start with the bare minimum of what might get us into a lower kingdom of glory, but instead He teaches us the celestial kingdom requirements. The ark of the covenant is considered the mercy seat, or the place where the presence of the Lord dwelt, and this was to be the first thing discussed in the process of construction.

The ark of the covenant was a wooden box made of shittim or acacia wood overlaid with gold. As was mentioned in the commentary for Exodus 25:3–7, acacia wood is a durable, bug- and rot-resistant wood. The tree grows in the harsh climate of the desert and, because of the limited water available to it, has a very hard, tight grain, making it difficult for insects and moisture to penetrate. The gold was likely plates of gold hammered over the wood and secured with nails, not gold leafing. Gold was often seen as a symbol



*The ark of the covenant*

of divinity, thus some scholars suggest that the acacia wood, grown in the harsh climate of the desert and overlaid with gold, could represent the Savior, who grew up in the dry climate of the Holy Land yet was overlaid with divinity from God. The incorruptible nature of the wood points to the sinless life of Christ. The indestructibility can point to the Savior’s power to overcome even the effects of death through His resurrection. The wood overlaid with gold could also point to the human and divine nature of the Savior.<sup>4</sup>

A cubit is an ancient standard measurement and is measured from the elbow to the tip of the longest finger (about 1.5 feet or 0.5 meters). This would mean that the ark chest would be about 3.75 feet (1.1 meters) long by 2.25 feet (0.7 meters) deep and tall. This is somewhat comparable in size to a vintage steamer trunk or end-of-bed chest.

The crown likely does not refer to a wearable crown (like the crown of a king, as depicted in the design of the ark of the covenant in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*) but instead to crown molding, such as the molding that crowned the top of the ark. The crown molding for our 3D ark was taken from the designs from King Tut’s tomb, which has many examples of “crowns” on the top of furniture.

(Compare Exodus 37:1–2.)

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<sup>4</sup> David M. Levy, *The Tabernacle: Shadows of the Messiah* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 2014), 82–83.

## **Exodus 25:12–16**

The chest was to have a ring attached to each of the four corners, two on each side, into which two poles were inserted to carry the ark. Though we have depicted our ark with the poles more toward the top, it is also very possible that poles were under the chest or very low down on the chest. Several of the chests found in King Tut's tomb show this lower design, though we followed the more recognizable design with the poles higher up the sides.

It is significant that of all the pieces of furniture that had poles and rings to carry them (table of showbread, altar of incense, and altar of sacrifice), only the ark was to have the poles kept in the rings at all times. This was likely because no one was to touch the ark itself due to its sacred nature. Keeping the poles in the ark would ensure that one could move the ark without accidentally touching it in the process of reinserting the poles.

The ark was to store the two stone tablets given to Moses on Mount Sinai. We learn later that the chest was also to contain the rod of Aaron that blossomed (see Numbers 17:8) and a bowl of manna (see Hebrews 9:4). There is also some debate whether the scroll on which the law was written was also inside the ark; however, the scriptural text seems to indicate the scroll was only placed on the side of the ark, not on the inside (see Deuteronomy 31:24–26).

(Compare Exodus 37:3–5.)

## **Exodus 25:17–20**

The Hebrew word for “mercy seat,” *kapporet*, means, simply, “covering.” William Tindale coined the term *mercy seat* in his translation of the English text of the Bible. He chose this term because the scriptures often refer to the presence of God where the throne of mercy was surrounded by guardians (cherubim). He felt this was a more meaningful word than simply “the covering.” The word has the same root as the word *atonement* (*kaphar* in Hebrew), which means “to cover.”

Remarkably the mercy seat or covering for the chest was to be made of solid gold pounded into shape. Though we don't know exactly how this was done, Michael Lyon, the illustrator for the collected works of Hugh Nibley, has suggested that a general mold was created into which the gold was poured to give it the basic shape. The flat covering and cherubim were then hammered into final shape. King Tut's beautiful face mask, a solid piece of gold hammered into shape, is perhaps the closest example of how the mercy seat and cherubim were shaped from a single piece of gold.

Though we do not know what a cherub looks like, there are many examples of guardian creatures found throughout the ancient Middle East, such as the great sphinxes. Ezekiel 1 describes cherubim as a combined human-, ox-, lion-, and eagle-like creature. One Jewish tradition states that the cherubim on the ark were a male and a female. The male represented the Lord, and the female, Israel. The two faced each other to create a space between their wings where the presence of the Lord could dwell.<sup>5</sup>

It was here, on the mercy seat, that the high priest sprinkled blood from the sacrifice once a year as he entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. On this holy day—the only day the high priest could enter—the ark was “covered,” or an atonement was made (again remember the word *atone* means “to cover”). This powerful symbol will be discussed more, but its connection to the blood of Christ that covers, or atones, for our sins is so symbolic and rich in meaning that pages could be written on this single type and shadow of Christ.

(Compare Exodus 37:6–9.)

## **Exodus 25:21–22**

The Lord commanded Moses to place the “testimony,” or the tablets of stone, within the ark of the covenant alongside the bowl of manna and the rod of Aaron. The chest might be considered somewhat similar to a time capsule or cornerstone that has important objects placed inside. Each of the objects points to an important part of Israel’s history and, in particular, to the story of the Exodus. It was almost as if the Israelites preserved these items, like a time capsule standing as physical evidence of God’s power, to help them remember their history.

It is also significant that the mercy seat (the covering) was placed over the tablets of stone. Remember that the word *atone* (*kaphar*) means “to cover” and that “mercy seat” is better translated simply as “covering.” Though the Lord did not state why the tablets were to be covered by the mercy seat, it is possible that it is a symbol that the law is covered (think atonement) by the blood of the sacrifice. This is perhaps to teach us that because of the blood of Christ, which was shed for us, the law is covered (atonement) and we are allowed to enter His presence through the high priest.

This is not to say the people do not have to obey the law but simply that all fall short of the glory of God. Because of our sins (disobeying the law), we are not worthy to enter the Holy of Holies. However, because of Christ’s blood, it is as if the law has been covered, allowing us to enter the Lord’s presence. It teaches us that only through the blood and the covering of the law are we able to enter. This only happens because of Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “Cherub,” last modified February 8, 2022, 21:14, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherub>.

We also learn that it is here, between the cherubim, that the Lord will make His presence known. We don't know what this entails, but simply, here in the Holy of Holies, the Lord will commune with His people through His anointed. It is significant that today our prophet likewise communes with the Lord in a room set apart within the temple called the Holy of Holies. In the Salt Lake Temple this room is located just off the celestial room.

### **Exodus 25:23–28**

As the ark of the covenant being the only piece of furniture in the Holy of Holies, we now will go to the Holy Place and discuss the furniture there. The table of showbread (spelled “shewbread” in the King James Version but pronounced “showbread”) is the first furnishing to discuss. The table of showbread was on the north side of the Holy Place. It is interesting that Exodus does not describe the altar of incense (the next logical item to cover as it is closest to the ark of the covenant) until Exodus 30:1–10.

The table of showbread was about 3 feet long (1 meter), 1.5 feet wide (0.5 meters), and 2.25 feet tall (0.75 meters). It was like the ark in that it had a crown on the top (likely in order to keep the showbread from sliding off) and four gold rings for the poles so that it could be carried. As previously mentioned, the Hebrew word for *crown* refers to something more like crown molding instead of a wearable crown for a king or queen. The table was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, foreshadowing Christ's mortality and divinity (acacia trees grow in the harsh environment of the desert, and gold pointed to Christ's divinity).

It is hard to know what the “hand breadth” refers to, but for our model we raised the edges of the table about the width of a hand all the way around the table, leaving a sunken middle to place the bread on. This would help so that as the Levites carried the table in the wilderness, the items on the table would not slide off.

(Compare Exodus 37:10–15.)



Left, the table of showbread; right, the ledge of the table of showbread

## **Exodus 25:29–30**

On the table of showbread were dishes, spoons, covers, and bowls. Though we don't know what purpose these all had, the dishes likely held the bread, the bowls likely held frankincense, and the spoons likely were for scooping the frankincense. In Leviticus 24:7 we learn that two bowls of frankincense were to either be set on top of the bread or to the sides of the two stacks (the Hebrew is not clear). According to Jewish tradition, there also was some sort of pitcher containing wine (which many scholars believe was for the drink offering).

Leviticus 24:5–6 describes the showbread as being two-tenths of an ephah. The bread was placed in two stacks of six loaves each, for a total of twelve loaves. There is debate on the measurement of an ephah, but some scholars suggest two-tenths would be about eighteen cups of flour, or about the equivalent of a five-pound sack of flour! This would mean the loaves were huge! Over the years, I have helped with several tabernacle youth camps at which several sisters have volunteered to make the showbread. Only a few ever made the bread with this much flour. Lifting a loaf of this size is surprisingly hard, as normal bread loaves are just not that size!

The showbread was to be eaten every Sabbath (which was Saturday for ancient Israel) along with possibly the wine for the drink offering that was also on the table. The word *showbread* means “bread of the face,” which in essence, means “the bread before the face of God” or, as it is sometimes called, the “bread of the Presence.” Bread was eaten for every meal and was highly symbolic because of its importance. Bread was seen as life-giving because it sustained and nourished humankind. Knowing of its importance, the Lord prayed, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11).

Breaking bread was also a symbol of unity and a sign of a covenant. In ancient times, when people were at war with an enemy and wanted to establish a treaty of peace, they did not sign a peace treaty; they instead broke bread with the other side. In essence, because people invite only friends over for dinner, by inviting an enemy to break bread, the message became, “We are now friends.”

With this in mind, think of the symbolism in the priests' eating showbread, or the bread of the Presence, every Sabbath. Though all Israelites did not participate in these communal meals, they were represented as if they did through the service of the priests. As the priests partook, they in essence were showing that through the ordinances of the tabernacle, the people could symbolically come into the presence of God and break bread with Him each week.

The connection to the sacrament is powerful. Each Sabbath, God invites us into His house to partake of the sacrament (communal meal). The priests break the bread and allow us to partake of this communal meal to show that we are now friends with God. How? Through the torn flesh and sacrificed body of the Savior.

(Compare Exodus 37:16.)



## Exodus 25:31–36

The next piece of furniture located with the Holy Place is the menorah, or lampstand. The King James Version uses the term “candlestick,” but this is a mistranslation: candles were not invented until over a thousand years later. The menorah, like the mercy seat (the covering for the ark) was to be made of a single piece of solid gold hammered into shape. In verse 39 we learn that the menorah, or lampstand, was to be made from a talent of gold—about seventy-five pounds of gold.<sup>6</sup>



*Menorah shaped flowers*

It is hard to know exactly what the menorah looked like, but we do know that it had seven branches total. Each branch (minus the center branch) had three sets of almonds, buds, and flowers on the arm. The center branch had four sets, with one set under each arm and one at the top. There is debate as to whether the menorah’s arms were curved or straight.

Though we don’t know for sure how such a large amount of gold was hammered into shape, it is likely that the general shape was carved into a stone to create a mold and then gold poured into the mold. The gold was then hammered into shape, creating the flowers, buds, and bowls along the arms. This would give the menorah the appearance of an almond tree.

The almond tree is significant for several reasons. First, the almond tree is the first tree to blossom in the spring in Israel; Christ is called the “first fruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Almond blossoms also are connected to Aaron’s staff that blossomed and was stored in the ark of the covenant. The blossoming of Aaron’s rod symbolized to the people that the Lord had chosen the family of Levi for bearing the priesthood, making it a symbol of authority and priesthood.

The features of branches, flowers, and fruit on the menorah made this lampstand almost tree-like. According to later Jewish tradition, the menorah was a symbol of the tree of life that was in the Garden of Eden. Jesus Christ has been compared to the tree of life because He gives life eternal through His Atonement.

(Compare Exodus 37:17–22.)

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<sup>6</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “Talent (measurement),” last modified April 4, 2022, 03:14, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talent\\_\(measurement\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talent_(measurement)).

## **Exodus 25:37–40**

The main purpose of the menorah, or lamp stand, was to give light to the Holy Place. In fact, this was the only light in the tabernacle (the Holy of Holies had no light, except perhaps from the presence of the Lord). Each branch had an oil lamp and a wick, the wick coming from the used linen garments of the priests. The light came from olive oil, which had been pressed out of crushed olives. The word *gethsemane* means “place of the olive press,” which is the name of the garden where Jesus suffered. So, just as the weight of the olive press squeezed out of the crushed olives the olive oil, so too Christ was pressed down by our sins, causing Him to bleed from every pore. Even the color of the olive oil, when first pressed, is the color of blood.

The number seven is seen as a symbol of completion or perfection in Judaism. The Creation, for example, was not complete or perfect until the seventh period, and the week is not complete until the seventh day, the Sabbath.<sup>7</sup>

As was mentioned in the commentary on Exodus 25:31–36, a talent of gold is about 75 pounds of gold.

With all of this in mind, the menorah becomes a powerful symbol of Jesus Christ. The Savior taught that He is the “light of the world” (John 8:12). The priests, who represent Israel, enter the Holy Place by the light of the menorah. The priest’s progression through the tabernacle symbolizes Israel’s journey back into the presence of God. Moving through the tabernacle, the priest leaves the world and enters a more sacred space where he receives the Light of the World. It is only through the olive oil (a symbol of Christ’s suffering) that we receive light for our journey. It is also significant that as we begin our process to reenter the presence of the Lord (symbolically through the priests) we pass the menorah, a symbol of the tree of life.

The menorah light is also a symbol of the Holy Ghost. Just as the priest could only receive this light after he entered the tabernacle, so too we receive the light of the gift of the Holy Ghost only after we enter the covenant path of baptism (perhaps a symbol of the laver). It is interesting to note that this gift is often bestowed within the walls of our chapels, the same location where the bread of the sacrament (a possible modern-day iteration of the showbread) is administered.

(Compare Exodus 37:23–24.)

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<sup>7</sup> Alonzo L. Gaskill, *The Lost Language of Symbolism* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2003), 123–129.

## **Exodus 26:1–2**

The Lord next described the four layers of coverings for the tabernacle, starting with the innermost layer of colorful fabric. Though the tabernacle did have solid walls (which will be discussed in later comments), the roof was simply layers of fabric stretched over the top. It is possible some sort of cross beams could also have been a part of the roof structure, but no mention of beams is made in scripture.

The innermost covering was composed of ten long loomed panels of fabric. This fabric, like the ephod and breastplate of the high priest, the tabernacle gate, and the outer and inner veils, was made from the same colors (minus the gold threads, which were only present in the clothing of the high priest). As has been mentioned, blue can represent heaven; purple, royalty; scarlet, the blood of the sacrifice; and white (the fine twined linen), purity. Each of these colors can symbolize various attributes of the Savior, who is from heaven, royal in lineage (both through God and King David), the true sacrifice, and pure and sinless in every way.

The ten panels were to be four cubits wide (6 feet or 1.8 meters) by twenty-eight cubits long (42 feet or 12.8 meters). The reason the covering was made from ten panels is that six feet is about the widest fabric a ground loom can make. It is interesting to note that only in this case is “fine twined linen” mentioned first before the other colors; in all other instances, linen is mentioned last. Some scholars believe this is because the fabric was primarily white, with colored thread used to embroider the cherubim on the white fabric. This would set apart this covering, making it less sacred in nature in comparison to the other fabrics in the tabernacle, such as the veil, made from the same material.

The embroidered cherubim running down the sides would likely not be visible because they would be covered from view by the gold paneled walls. They would be visible on the ceiling. Because cherubim, in scripture, guard the way to the presence of God, seeing the embroidered cherubim as they entered the Holy of Holies and knowing more were hidden behind the gold paneled walls likely added to priests’ sense that they were entering the presence of God.

It is meaningful that the most beautiful and costly of the four layers that cover the tabernacle is on the inside, not the outside. Perhaps we only can find the beauty of Christ through truly learning of Him by entering His sacred space, a space which represents Him in every aspect.

(Compare Exodus 36:8–9).

## **Exodus 26:3–6**

The ten curtains, or panels, were to be grouped into two groups of five each, with each set of five likely joined by being stitched together. The two groups were then joined at the center by one hundred blue loops (fifty on the edge of each edge for a total of one hundred loops). Fifty gold clasps (*taches* in the King James Version) then joined the two sets of curtains. This design might seem odd, but it fits perfectly within the context of the Bedouin tent. Because the center fabric bears the most weight from the outer fabric pulling against it, Bedouins always first replace the center portion of the tents first.

As the tent began to wear from the intense heat and numerous set-ups and take-downs, new fabric would always be added first at the center, and the oldest and end curtains would be removed from the group of five. Thus, these gold clasps allowed for the fabric, which would age as the Israelites traveled in the wilderness, to be systematically replaced from the center out.

We find out later in the chapter, in verse 33, that these gold *taches* or clasps are where the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies hung from (Exodus 26:33–34). This means that the center point of this combined large fabric covering fell at the line between the two rooms.

(Compare Exodus 36:10–13.)

## **Exodus 26:7–8**

The next layer of coverings (going from inside to outside) is a layer of goat-hair loomed fabric. This layer is like the colorful fabric below it except that instead of two sets of five panels (for a total of ten), the goat-hair covering includes eleven curtains or panels (one set of five and one set of six).

As a personal note, for years, I had studied the tabernacle and never truly understood how or why these coverings were put together in the form they were. It was not until I was given an authentic Bedouin tent and learned more about the tent that I began to appreciate the significance of the goat-hair layer in particular. Below are some of the things I have learned.

Bedouin tents are amazing pieces of technology. The fabric is made from goat hair twisted together to make coarse thread which is then woven together by running long courses of the thread back and forth between a loom of two wooden sticks held tight at each end by stakes. Every other alternating thread is then tied to another wood stick which creates the *heddle* (a harness used to guide the warp threads in a loom).

A rod with additional goat-hair threads wound around it is fed back and forth through the loom as the heddle is raised or lowered to move half of the threads up and down. This tedious process is done thousands of times until a single piece of long fabric is woven. This is all done on the ground, with the weaver (generally a woman) sitting on the threads as she moves down the panel. The loom could be “rolled up” and moved from campsite to campsite when its owners needed to travel. Weaving fabric is an intricate, time-consuming process.

These curtains, or panels, were two cubits longer than the colorful fabric, meaning they were four cubits wide (6 feet or 1.8 meters), and thirty cubits long (45 feet or 13.7 meters). This would mean they would protect or cover by one cubit on each side the more colorful and costly fabric below. There also was one more additional panel (eleven instead of ten), so it could likewise cover the inner fabric on the two ends. The time that would be required to loom these panels is staggering.

The goat-hair fabric would not have a tight weave, in fact when holding up modern Bedouin tent fabric, one can see small holes or gaps in the fabric. This helps the fabric to breathe in the hot weather. When it does rain in the Holy Land—which is not often—it pours; however, the goat-hair soaks up the water and tightens to create a water-resistant layer. Moreover, because goats in Israel are mostly black, the fabric would be a dark black color, which absorbed the heat, creating a remarkable way to help cool the tent. The goat-hair fabric naturally cooled the inside during the heat and kept it dry during the rain. It is no wonder that the Bedouin tent has stayed virtually the same over thousands of years of use.

(Compare Exodus 36:14–15.)

### **Exodus 26:9–13**

Like the first layer of fabric, as was mentioned in the previous section, the second covering over the tabernacle was made up of two groups. However, instead of two groups of five like the colored fabric, the goat-haired layer was one group of five, and another a group of six panels. They also were joined together with 50 loops on each edge (for a total of 100 loops) connected by bronze *taches* or clasps. We are not told what the loops are made of, but they were probably made from additional threads of the goat-hair. The colorful inner layer used gold clasps, while this layer used bronze, demonstrating the more sacred nature of the inner covering (gold being more costly than bronze).

Like the colored first layer, the two sections connected by bronze clasps could accommodate new curtains being added to the center. At the center, the greatest strength was necessary because it held the weight of the rest of the fabric (see commentary for Exodus 25:3–6).

Though not directly related to the tabernacle (which did not increase in size), the Bedouin tent uses new panels of fabric added to the center to make the tent larger. As a family grows, they can continue to add new panels, enlarging the tent. This process of adding new goat-hair fabric panels to the center is what Isaiah referred to when he stated, “Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes” (Isaiah 54:2). This process enlarges the tent, requiring the stakes to be lengthened, or moved out, so more of the family can come under the canopy of the now-larger tent.

It is also significant that many Bedouin tents are divided into two rooms. The first room is for the men and boys while the second (or inner) room is for the women and girls. The men guard the women, who the men see as their most valuable possessions, by being at the main entrance to the tent. Separating the two rooms was a beautifully embroidered dividing cloth. Similarly, the tabernacle was divided into two main rooms: the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. Inside the most inner room, the ark of the covenant—the most sacred piece of furniture—was symbolically guarded by cherubim beautifully embroidered on the veil.

This is a powerful sentiment. The people live in goat-hair tents with their families, with the men in one room and the women in the next. The Lord, who is to “tabernacle” among them (see John 1:14 Young’s Literal Translation) likewise dwells in His own goat-haired tent protected within the Holy of Holies. This is an exquisitely beautiful type of Christ, who came to dwell among us in a body of flesh and blood.

(Compare Exodus 36:16–18.)

### **Exodus 26:14**

The next two layers are a layer of rams’ skins dyed red and a layer of what the King James Version translates as badgers’ skins but which is better translated just as a durable leather of sorts.

The third layer, made of rams’ skins, was likely either dyed or painted red. It is unknown if the hair was removed or not. The Bible tells us little about this layer and gives no dimensions, but it is reasonable to propose that it also hung over the sides and then was tied out by stakes. This would provide additional protection against the rain while also allowing for more air circulation by pulling these coverings out on the sides.

This layer reminds us of the ram that was caught in the thicket and was sacrificed in place of Isaac. Red symbolizes blood, death, and sacrifice—which all relate to the Savior. This layer can point us to how (through the tabernacle ceremonial observance) a substitute, Jesus Christ, is provided to us just as the ram caught in the thicket was provided to Abraham and Isaac.

The fourth and last layer, as was mentioned, was made of a sort of durable leather. However, we don't know much about it because the meaning of the original Hebrew has been lost and the text does not give any significant details about the leather. It may have been a simple brown leather on the outside with no distinguishing beauty or design, unlike the colorful inner fabric.

Some writers have compared the four layers to our own coming to know Christ. As we come to the Savior, we might notice that He appears as any other human who has been born. Isaiah taught that the Messiah “hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2). Yet, as we peel back the layers, so to speak, of His divinity, the first thing we find is the symbol of His sacrifice in the red dyed ram skins, again pointing to the ram caught in the thicket and to the atonement.

As we then pull back another layer, we expose the goat-hair layer, which could represent His mortality among His people. Just as wandering Israel dwelled in goat-hair tents, the Lord dwelled in a mortal body. As John taught, “The Word was made flesh, and [tabernacled] among us” (John 1:14). Alma taught the Lord “will come among us at the time of his dwelling in his mortal tabernacle ... that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities” (Alma 7:8, 12).

With the innermost layer, we find the true beauty of the Savior represented by the colorful fabric, with each color representing different aspects of the character and attributes of Christ. Beneath this last layer, we find the path that leads back to the Father, represented by the progression from the Holy Place to the Holy of Holies. It is here, ironically covered by these layers, that the true purpose of the Messiah—helping humanity return to God's presence—is revealed.

(Compare Exodus 36:19.)

## **Exodus 26:15–18**

Now that we have learned about the four layers of coverings, we turn to the actual walls of the structure. The tabernacle itself was built from tall wooden panels, or boards, made from acacia wood (“shittim wood” in the King James Version). As has been discussed, acacia trees grow in the barren deserts and create a very durable and rot-resistant wood. This is because with so little water, the wood grain grows very dense, making it difficult for water and insects to penetrate.

Each panel was ten cubits tall (15 feet or 4.6 meters) and 1.5 cubits wide (2.25 feet or 0.7 meters). There is debate whether the panels were solid or simply frames, the latter, of course, being far easier to transport

because it would mean that the walls would be a lighter weight. There were two *tenons*, or feet, at the bottom of the panel or board. These feet would then be inserted into silver bases, which will be discussed in following verses.

The two long walls (the south and north walls) were to have twenty boards each, which would make the structure thirty cubits long (45 feet or 13.7 meters). Because the walls were made of these individual panels, they could be disassembled and carried on carts. We learn in Numbers 7:6–7 that a total of six ox carts were used to transport the heaviest items, four of which would be used for these wood panels. With forty-eight panels total (twenty for each the north and south sides and eight for the back) this would mean each cart would carry twelve panels.

(Compare Exodus 36:20–23.)

### **Exodus 26:19–21**

Below the panels that created the walls were a total of ninety-six silver sockets or bases (forty each on the north and south sides, and sixteen on the back, or west, side). Each base had a slot in it and was the width of half of the board (meaning two silver bases were under each wall panel). The size and weight are not given, but one writer estimated each base to be 125 pounds. He found this by taking the total amount of silver collected from all Israelite males for the redemption price (see Numbers 18:16). With this offering of silver, he then estimated the approximate weight for all parts of the tabernacle that required silver, including these ninety-six bases.<sup>8</sup> Most scholars believe the number of Israelites (about 600,000 men, not including women and children) as recorded in Exodus 12:37–38 is likely exaggerated. This would mean that his estimate of 125 pounds (based on the redemption price offered by all Israelite men) could be lower, but it does help us to know that whatever the case, these bases likely weighed a considerable amount.

Why have these bases? The scriptures do not tell us, but the bases likely stabilized the walls so that they would be secure in a windstorm. One hundred twenty-five pounds per base would create a substantial load (12,000 total pounds) to stabilize the tabernacle.

The silver used for this foundation is quite significant. It was the only item that was not donated. Instead, a ransom or redemptive tax was paid by all males twenty years and older (Exodus 30:13). There is debate as to exactly why this tax had to be paid,<sup>9</sup> but whatever the reason, many examples in scripture show that Israel needed to be ransomed.

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8 C. W. Slemming, *Made According to Pattern* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2018), 47-48.

9 William H. C. Propp, *The Anchor Bible: Exodus 19–40* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006), 534–538.



Silver can also remind us of the stories of Joseph’s being sold for twenty pieces of silver (Genesis 37:28) and Jesus Christ’s being betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. Selling Joseph into slavery ultimately brought salvation to the family of Israel, the same way that Judas’s betrayal of Jesus brought redemption for all those who believe in Christ.

The ninety-six silver bases created a firm foundation upon which the entire tabernacle rested. Similarly, it is only through the solid foundation of the ransom (redemption) made through Christ that our path back to the presence of God can be made.

(Compare Exodus 36:24–26.)

### **Exodus 26:22–25**

The back wall (or western side) was made from eight boards or panels (six plus the two corner panels) similar to the forty panels for the north and south walls. There is much debate about what the corner panels or boards looked like, but they somehow connected the three walls (north, south, and west). Like the other walls, these eight panels had silver sockets below them—two under each panel for a total of sixteen bases.

Because the only dimension for the panels is given as 1.5 cubits wide in verse 16, the outer dimensions of the back (or western) wall is suggested to be twelve cubits. Though the inside width for the Holy of Holies is not given, because Solomon’s temple doubled the proportions and had a Holy of Holies twenty cubits long and wide (1 Kings 6:20), it is assumed the tabernacle’s Holy of Holies was ten cubits long and wide. Because of this, later Jewish rabbis interpreted this to mean that the panels must be one cubit thick (twelve minus ten leaves two cubits, or one cubit for the thickness of each wall). This, however, is very unlikely since the walls would have been extremely heavy and not very portable. One suggestion, as used in the model we created, is that the corner boards or panels extended past the other walls or possibly were L-shaped to create a more secure connection. This would mean the walls could be much thinner and lighter.



*The L-shaped corner of the tabernacle*

(Compare Exodus 36:27–30.)

## **Exodus 26:26–30**

To help connect the forty-eight wall panels together, bars, or staves, were run down the sides. There is significant debate regarding the bars, but below are three proposed options for how they worked. The first is that the five bars were equally divided up along the wall, with the middle bar simply referring to a bar running down the middle or center of the space on each wall. A second option would be that each bar ran only half the length of the wall (creating two bars at the top that abut each other) with another bar at the center, possibly running on the other side of the boards. The third option, which is proposed by more traditional Jewish commentary (but probably is the least likely), has the center bar running through the middle of the actual boards. This proposal would require the boards to be thicker (hence the cubit thickness proposed by many Jewish rabbis) in order to have enough strength for the boards to not break in half at the center hole.

Verse 30 again says that Moses saw the tabernacle in vision. The visual of how the tabernacle was to be built would have been crucial in clarifying what the text meant. It also gave divine significance to the design. This was not just Moses putting something together in a rough shape of what he had heard. Instead, the structure was based on both a vision and a description. There should be no question in our minds of the divine provenance of this structure.

(Compare Exodus 36:31–34.)

## **Exodus 26:31–32**

As with other parts of the tabernacle, the inner veil is first discussed before the outer “door of the tent” (Exodus 26:36), thus showing that God first taught the more sacred before moving to the less sacred. This veil was made of blue, purple, scarlet, and white linen threads. The colored dyes were likely added to wool thread (since wool takes dye better than linen), with linen as the warp of the fabric. As has been discussed, the colors are highly significant in both their high cost and in the possible symbolism of each color. Blue can represent heaven; purple, royalty; red, sacrifice; and white, purity.

These same colors were also used in the clothing of the high priest, with the addition of gold threads. In addition, all Jews were to wear four blue tassels on the corners of their garments (see Numbers 15:38; Deuteronomy 22:12). These four tassels were to remind the Israelites of the commandments constantly. Because blue was connected with the tabernacle and the high priest, it connected every Jew to the priesthood and to the temple through its presence in the fabrics of the gate, door, and veil. It also connected the high priest to each of the points of entry, showing how Israel must enter through the high priest. Jesus Christ is the Great High Priest, and from the start (the gate) to the end (the veil), we must go through Him to return to God.



*The veil of the tabernacle*

Embroidered cherubim on the veil symbolically guarded the presence of the Lord. Before the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, he would have to pass these cherubim. Many scholars compare the tabernacle to the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve passed the cherubim as they left the presence of the Lord going eastward. The high priest now symbolically reverses that by going west, also passing the cherubim before entering. Through Adam, humankind was cast out of the presence of God; through Christ (the Great High Priest), we are enabled to reenter that presence.

In front of the veil were four pillars made from shittim or acacia wood overlaid in gold. The bases of these four pillars were also made of silver like the sockets or bases of the walls.

(Compare Exodus 36:35–36.)

### **Exodus 26:33–34**

Here we learn that the veil was to be hung directly under the row of golden rings that held the two halves of the inner colorful covering that was discussed in Exodus 25:3–6. This veil was to separate the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, creating a barrier between the less sacred and the more sacred.

Perhaps the most powerful symbol of the veil is taught in Hebrews 10:20, which teaches that the veil is symbolic of Christ's flesh. Just as the high priest representing all Israel had to pass through the veil to reenter the presence of the Lord, so too we must enter through Christ on our journey back to our Heavenly Father. At Jesus's death, the veil of the temple split in two (Matthew 27:51), allowing all to have the opportunity to enter again through Christ. It is powerful that each Sabbath we partake of torn bread (not cut bread), connecting the sacrament, the torn veil, and the torn flesh of Christ, which all are significant to our eternal journey back to the presence of the Lord.

### **Exodus 26:35–37**

Consistent with the pattern established in the rest of the tabernacle sections of Exodus, the Lord first discussed the more sacred Holy of Holies in 26:31–34 and then the Holy Place in verses 35–37. The Holy Place could be entered only by a priest, a male descendant of the tribe of Levi specifically of the family of Aaron, the first high priest.



*The door of the tabernacle*

The Holy Place housed three pieces of furniture: The table of the shewbread was on the north or right side as one entered. The menorah, or golden lampstand, was on the south or left side. Though not mentioned in these verses, the altar of incense was placed in front of the veil in the center.

As with the Holy of Holies, pillars were placed at the entrance to the Holy Place. However, in this case there were five pillars with brass or bronze bases instead of silver bases. The change from brass to silver shows progression from less holy to more holy, brass being

the less expensive of the two metals. This gradation of holiness existed throughout the tabernacle. The entrance to the Holy Place had a veil (called the “door of the tent”) as well. It also was made with blue, purple, scarlet, and white linen threads. Unlike with the inner veil, no cherubim are mentioned, making this a symbolically less elaborate division.

(Compare Exodus 36:37–38.)



*The altar of sacrifice*

## **Exodus 27:1–2**

Moving from the most sacred (the Holy of Holies) to the outer courtyard, the Lord discusses the altar of sacrifice. This is the place where animals were offered in “similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:7). It was the only place non-Levite Israelites could come to worship since the tabernacle proper could only be entered by the priests.

The altar was made of shittim (acacia) wood covered over by brass or bronze. As described in previous comments, acacia wood is a durable, insect- and rot-resistant wood. The altar is five square cubits wide and deep (7.5 feet or 2.3 meters) and three cubits tall (4.5 feet or 1.8 meters). It was by far the largest piece of furniture.

Brass (better translated as “bronze”) is often associated with judgment. The brazen serpent was a way to judge the Israelites on their faith. After being bitten by the poisonous serpents, an Israelite could be healed by looking to the brazen serpent. Bronze also withstood the heat of fire, thus protecting the acacia wood of the altar. Just as Israel would be healed by looking to the brazen serpent and would be forgiven of sin through the sacrifices offered at the brazen altar, we can be healed by looking to the cross. We also can withstand the punishment of judgment fire by trusting in the Savior and accepting His sacrifice, which was foreshadowed here at the altar.

The altar symbolized many things. On each of the four corners of the altar was a horn-shaped protrusion. The number four often symbolizes the four corners of the earth, and horns in ancient times were often symbols of power and strength. For certain types of sacrifices, the animal's blood was dabbed on or covered over the horns. The underlying Hebrew word for *atonement* simply means "to cover." Thus, the blood covering the four horns could symbolize the power or strength of Jesus Christ's Atonement reaching all four corners of the earth. In addition, an Israelite who had been accused of a crime could flee to the bronze altar and beg for temporary asylum or protection by grabbing hold of the horn of the altar (see Exodus 21:13–14). We see an example of this when Adonijah fled from Solomon and held to the horns of the altar, seeking mercy (1 Kings 2:28). In like manner, each of us must flee to the cross (the place of the Savior's sacrifice) and seek mercy and refuge from Christ through His Atonement.

(Compare Exodus 38:1–2.)

### **Exodus 27:3–8**

The Lord here gives instructions for creating the various tools used at the bronze altar of sacrifice. The pans were used for collecting and disposing of the ashes from the sacrifices. The shovels were used to scoop up the ashes. The fleshhooks, or meat forks, were used to place the sacrifice on the altar so it could be burned, rotated, and moved. The firepans were used for collecting coals to be used for lighting the menorah and the altar of incense and so forth.

There is debate as to exactly what "grate of network of brass" describes. It could either be a grate halfway down on the sides, or it could possibly mean that the grate itself (where the sacrifice was burned) was halfway down the wall of the altar.

Like the ark of the covenant, altar of incense, and table of showbread, the altar of sacrifice had four rings in each corner for transportation. Long staffs could be inserted into the rings so that the Levites could carry the altar as they traveled in the wilderness. The priests also could use these rings to tie the animals during the sacrificial process.

(Compare Exodus 38:3–7.)

### **Exodus 27:9–13**

The outer courtyard is the final part of the tabernacle structure. This again shows that the Lord first starts with the most sacred (the Holy of Holies) and then moves to the least sacred, even though Israel

(represented by the high priest) would enter from the courtyard, then move into the Holy Place, and finally into the Holy of Holies. The Lord is always more interested in the most sacred.

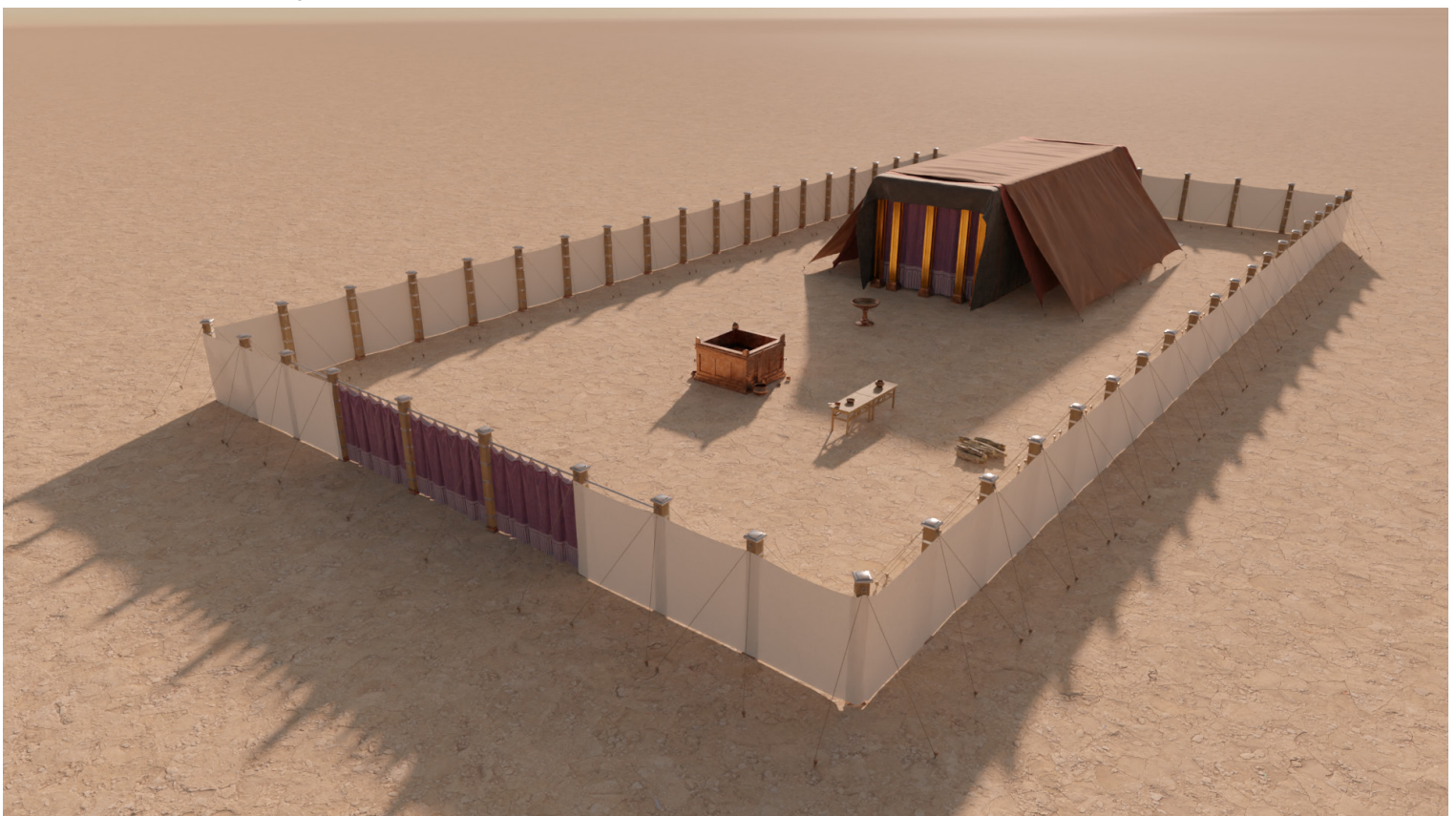
This courtyard was created by four walls of white linen fabric. Linen can be a symbol of righteousness or purity. Revelation 19:8 reads, “For the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” The garments of the Levites, priests, and high priest as well as the veils and coverings were made with white linen.

The process of fulling (how the fabric was made white) was arduous and can be connected to the process of purity. Our journey to become pure will not be easy. In particular, the journey the Savior made required great suffering and, ultimately, His death so that we can be made pure.

The courtyard walls were to be one hundred cubits long (150 feet or 45.7 meters) by fifty cubits wide (75 feet or 22.9 meters). Exodus 27:18 tells us that the walls were to be five cubits tall (7.5 feet or 2.3 meters). These long pieces of fabric were hung on wooden pillars. Unlike the inner sanctuary walls, which rested on a foundation of silver bases, these outer pillars rested on brass or bronze sockets or bases. The different metals show the gradation of sanctity. The outer courtyard is least sacred; therefore, bronze is used for most of the items, including the bases of the pillars. As a worshiper progressed toward more sacred areas, silver and gold were used to show the symbolic progression of sanctity.

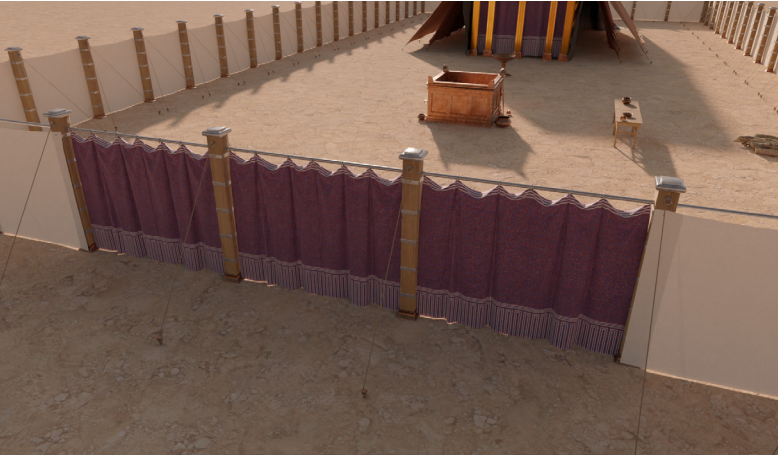
(Compare Exodus 38:9–13.)

*The tabernacle courtyard*



## Exodus 27:14–19

The east wall of the outer courtyard was the main entrance to the whole tabernacle and was the only entrance to the courtyard. This last wall (the other three were discussed in 27:9–13) was fifty cubits wide (75 feet or 22.9 meters), with three sections (two sides and a center section for the gate).



*The gate of the tabernacle*

It is interesting to note that the gate or main entrance was quite wide: twenty cubits (30 feet or 9.1 meters). The great width of the gate could be a symbol of the fact that the way back to the presence of the Lord is wide enough for all to enter. Though there is only one entrance, all can enter.

As mentioned in previous comments, the gate was made from the same colors as the clothing of the high priest (minus the gold threads), the coverings, door, and veil of the tabernacle. Each of these colors can represent attributes of Christ. Blue, heaven; purple, royalty; scarlet, sacrifice; and white (linen), purity. The high priest and each of these points of entry of the tabernacle are all connected through their shared colors.

One of the titles the Savior gives Himself is the Gate or Door. He stated, “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9). It is as if the Savior as the Great High Priest (represented by the colors), stands at each of the main areas of division: the gate, door, and veil. From the very beginning to the very end of our journey back to God, the Savior stands beckoning us to enter through Him. As we pass from one point to the next, it is always through and because of the Savior that we can progress.

(Compare Exodus 38:14–20.)

## Exodus 27:20–21

The Lord here commands that the menorah or oil lamp stand in the Holy Place should be lit from olive oil that is “beaten” to create the light for the tabernacle. In similar fashion, the Savior endured severe beating, which ultimately contributed to the cost of His Atonement. As Isaiah prophesied, “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and



with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). It is only through His suffering that we are healed. It is only by His great pain that we can have light on our journey back into the presence of God.

This light was to be continually burning. To make that possible, the priest had to trim the lamp, add oil, and relight it every morning and evening. Likewise, we must continually work to keep the Light of Christ in our lives. Fittingly, God commands us to pray in the morning, the evening, and always, which is a way that we can keep this light burning. Like the tabernacle’s light, our light ultimately comes from the Savior, whose intense suffering in Gethsemane was symbolized by the beaten olive oil.

## **Exodus 28: Introduction**

This is one of the more significant chapters for me in Exodus. I have a special interest in these verses because I took on the enormous task of recreating the clothing of the high priest. The process took about two years and led to much of what I do today as a career. It is because of creating the clothing of the high priest that I am writing this commentary.

My interest in the tabernacle began probably around 2003 when I started studying about ancient temples to better understand modern temples. As I learned about the clothing of the high priest, I became fascinated by the powerful and deep symbolism. Over the next decade or so, I began creating a few biblical replicas, which I used as a Sunday School teacher. Most were small and simple, but I kept taking on new projects.

As I continued to study the clothing, I found that very few accurate replicas had been made (two to three total that I found in the world). Because of the complexity of the combined colors of threads and cost of

stones, most replicas were basic costumes with cloth from a typical fabric store. I respect the efforts made, but I had hoped for something more historically accurate. In the fall of 2013 when I finally decided that I would take on the project of recreating the full outfit as close to the Bible text as I could (except for



*The clothing of the high priest*

things like the real gold). I began researching every aspect of the clothing—details like what types of fabric and what stones should be used, what the ephod might look like, and hundreds of other points.

In the end, I built a LEGO machine to spin the colored threads, and I hand loomed the breastplate and ephod. I had a stone cutter cut the stones, and then I engraved the letters on each stone, made settings, and attached them to the fabric breastplate. I embossed the golden crown, and a friend, Mandy Prows, and her mother sewed the rest of the garments. It took two years to finish, but it was perhaps one of the most significant projects I have ever done.

Because the text of Exodus 28 may be confusing, I would recommend watching my video entitled “Exodus 28 - The Jewish Priestly Garments” on YouTube.<sup>10</sup> This video covers each of the verses, showing the process I took to make the full outfit. With this background, I will now share some of my thoughts on what I learned through that process.

### **Exodus 28:1**

Before the Lord finishes describing the rest of the tabernacle construction, He interjects a description of the clothing of the high priest and priests. At this time, the tribe of Levi had not yet been designated as the tribe that would represent Israel through the priesthood. Only Aaron (the first high priest) and his sons (designated as priests) are mentioned. Once called, the Levites would also wear the same white linen garments described in Exodus 28:39–42.

The most likely reason behind the interjection is that Exodus 27:21 (the last verse before chapter 28) is the first mention the Lord makes of Aaron and his sons working in the tabernacle. Thus, the Lord now describes the sacred clothing they will wear as they serve there.

The ancient priesthood (what is often called the Levitical or Aaronic Priesthood) had three main offices or divisions: Levites, priests, and high priest. Levites included any male descendent of the tribe of Levi who was at least thirty years old (Numbers 4:3). David was thirty when he became king of Israel (2 Samuel 5:4). The Savior began His ministry at the age of thirty (Luke 3:23), symbolically connecting Him to these two important roles of priest and king. A priest was likewise a Levite, but specifically a descendent of Aaron, the brother of Moses. Aaron was the first high priest over Israel. The high priest was the highest office, and only one man at any given time could be designated the high priest. The oldest son of the high priest became the next high priest at the death of his father or when the father could no longer serve in the office.

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<sup>10</sup> “Exodus 28 – The Jewish Priestly Garments,” Messages of Christ, video, 7:14, October 5, 2015, <https://youtube.com/watch?v=mznSvWsvoXc>.

### **Exodus 28:2–3**

Giving clothing in ancient times was seen as a symbol of the bestowal of power or authority. Because a single piece of clothing could take hundreds of hours to make from start to finish, gifting clothing was a far more significant gift than it is today. Many examples in scriptures show the importance of clothing: The Lord gave Adam and Eve coats of skins before they went out into the world (Genesis 3:21). Israel gave his son Joseph a beautiful coat to show his great love for his son (Genesis 37:3). Elijah gave his mantle to Elisha before being taken up into heaven, symbolizing the transfer of authority and power (2 Kings 2:11–14). The father of the prodigal son gave his son his best robe to symbolize that he is again part of the family (Luke 15:22).

Even the very word *atonement* can be connected to bestowing clothing. The Hebrew word for *atonement*, *kaphar*, means “to cover, purge, or make reconciliation.” As Adam and Eve left the garden, they were not left naked and ashamed because of their transgression. Instead, the Lord provided coats of skins for them to cover their nakedness. Since there would not have been death up to this point in the Garden of Eden, these coats of skins likely came from the first animal killed in the garden. Though it is not mentioned in the text, it is probable that this animal was the same animal used by the Lord to teach Adam and Eve about the law of sacrifice. It is also possible that the animal was a lamb.

Thus, as Adam and Eve went throughout their lives, they would have a constant reminder of the death of the Lamb of God, who “covered” them to protect them and hide their nakedness and guilt for their transgression. This clothing would constantly remind them of the importance of Jesus Christ as the true source of atonement—ultimately realized through His sacrifice and death. His Atonement similarly covers all our nakedness and guilt before God.

Aaron and his sons were dressed in the robes of the priesthood, symbolizing their authority and power to act on behalf of the people. Correspondingly, when Elisha retrieved Elijah’s cloak and struck the waters of Jordan with it, he symbolically stepped into Elijah’s place, literally clothed in a mantle symbolic of his new authority. As will be discussed later, when the sons of Aaron were anointed, they also had a direct connection to the sacrifice and Atonement not only through the symbolism of the clothing (being “covered over”) but also through the actual blood of the sacrifice. This should have taught Aaron and his sons that it was only through Christ that they could be cleansed and authorized to act as priests. It also should have taught the congregation of Israel (and us) the same thing.

## **Exodus 28:4–5**

The priests and Levites wore four pieces of clothing, each made of white linen. The first layer, the breeches or undergarments (Exodus 28:42), went from the waist to the thigh. These were to cover the nakedness of the priests. The second layer was the robe, which according to tradition, was to be seamless. A seamless robe was difficult to make and added to the significant cost already associated with the clothing. Interestingly, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus wore a seamless robe just before His crucifixion. It was this robe that the soldiers cast lots for because of its great value (John 19:23–24). The third addition is the mitre or bonnet (better translated as “turban”). This was a long piece of fabric that wrapped around the head of the priests. Lastly was the girdle or sash, which was tied around the waist.

In addition to these four white linen garments worn by all priests and Levites, the high priest wore four additional garments: the breastplate, the ephod, the blue robe, and the mitre, or crown. They are often called the “golden garments” because each of the pieces contained gold.

These golden garments were to be made from gold, blue, purple, scarlet, and fine linen thread. As with other parts of the tabernacle, the Lord ordered the list from most costly (gold) to least costly (fine linen). Gold can be seen as a symbol of divinity. Blue can represent heaven, possibly symbolizing how the priesthood power comes from above. Purple often symbolized royalty because of its great cost to produce, reserving it for only the wealthiest. Scarlet, or red, can symbolize sacrifice, blood, or atonement. The white of the fine linen can represent purity. Revelation 19:8 mentions that fine linen represents the righteousness of the saints.

One of the many titles given to the Savior is the Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). Just as it was only symbolically through the earthly high priest that Israel could enter the presence of the Lord, so too it is only through Jesus Christ that we can enter the eternal heavens above.

## **Exodus 28:6–12**

The ephod was to be made of the same colors as the gate, door, and veil, connecting the clothing of the high priest to the points of access at the tabernacle. The one difference is that the clothing of the high priest had added strands of gold thread. This was likely made by pounding the gold into thin sheets and then cutting the sheets into small threads that could be woven in. While we don’t know why gold was not added to the other fabric, it was possibly to show that ultimately it was the high priest (who represents Christ) who was the most significant entrance point into the tabernacle. Truly, it is only through the Messiah that we can reenter the presence of God. The temple ordinances in all their beauty do not save us. Only Jesus, the Great High Priest, can do that.

We don't know much about the actual size or shape of the ephod, but it seems to have been some sort of apron (girdle), either on the front or the back of the high priest. In addition to the apron, two shoulder straps went up the back and over the shoulders. On each of these were two black onyx stones with the names of the twelve tribes engraved on them—six names on each.

Exodus 28:12 states that the stones inscribed with the twelve tribes were a memorial before the Lord worn by Aaron. The high priest, who represented Christ, was to bear the weight of all Israel. As Isaiah so beautifully stated, “surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4). This would always be a symbol to the priest of his awesome responsibility of bearing Israel. His clothing would always be a reminder of the ultimate mission of the Savior, who would bear our sins and sufferings.

### **Exodus 28:13–21**

The breastplate was made from a single piece of fabric that was one span wide and two spans long. A span is the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the pinky finger, or about nine inches. This was then folded in half, creating a square piece. This fold created a “pocket” where the Urim and Thummim were stored (see Exodus 28:30). At the top of the breastplate, gold rings were attached to the corners with gold chains attached to clasps (“ouches” in the King James Version) on the two shoulder stones.



*The breastplate of the high priest*

As has been mentioned, the colors were the same found in the ephod of the high priest and in the tabernacle gate, coverings, door, and veil. These colors can each connect to the attributes of the Savior.

Each stone on the breastplate was a different precious stone and was engraved with the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Many of the meanings for the original Hebrew words for the stones have been lost over the centuries, so we don't know what each type of stone originally was. The symbolism of the breastplate will be discussed in the commentary for verses 22–29.

## Exodus 28:22–29

In 28:22–24 we have a duplicate description—with some added details—of the chains described in verses 13–14. Verse 25 describes the bottom of the breastplate, with two more golden rings attached to blue ribbons that are tied to two gold rings on the ephod. The breastplate hung from the top gold chains and rings, and the bottom rings and blue ribbons tied the breastplate to the chest so it did not swing out while the high priest was working.

Verse 29 says, “Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart,” symbolizing that Israel should always be near his heart or feelings. Perhaps there is no more beautiful symbol of the Savior than in these two verses regarding the clothing. Not only does the Savior bear us on His shoulders by carrying our burdens and sorrows, but He holds us near His heart. As one young man at one of the many tabernacle camps I attended said, “Jesus carries us *and* loves us.”

As previously mentioned, the colors of the breastplate can represent attributes of Christ: gold, divinity; blue, heaven; purple, royalty; scarlet, sacrifice or blood; and white (linen), purity. How beautiful that we as Israel (symbolized by the stones) are fastened to these colors! It is also powerful that we are represented as precious stones. The names could have been engraved on wood or written on papyrus or animal skins, but the Lord chose to represent us as precious, beautiful stones.

Having spent many hours recreating the breastplate by hand, these are a few of the powerful lessons I have learned: The Lord wants to teach us that as the Great High Priest, He carries us and loves us. In Gethsemane and on the cross, the Savior carried us. Symbolically and literally, He carried the weight of our sins and sorrows.

Depicting Israel as beautiful stones shows that God sees our great worth and potential, despite our sins and many shortcomings. In His eyes, we are precious stones beyond value. It is also interesting to note that the beauty of the breastplate is made by the stark differences between the stones. This can perhaps teach us that the Lord loves our differences and that it is these vibrant differences that bring beauty to the Church of Christ.

It is fascinating that the stones (representing Israel) are fastened to (or made at-one with) the beautiful fabric of the breastplate. Again, each of these colors could represent various attributes of Christ. Thus, in essence, the breastplate symbolizes how we can become *at-one* with Christ, taking on His attributes, becoming like Him. It also teaches that it is only because we are *at-one* with Him that we can be precious stones.

## Exodus 28:30

The folded fabric of the breastplate created a pocket where the Urim and Thummim could be stored. Though we know very little about what the Urim and Thummim looked like or how it was used from the text of the scriptures, we do have some possible insights from later scripture and Jewish writings. The Hebrew words *urim* and *thummim* likely mean “lights” and “perfections.” The ending “im” is plural, making both words plural. They were likely two objects, possibly a white and a black stone, used for receiving revelation from the Lord.

First Samuel 14:41 gives perhaps the best example of how the Urim and Thummim possibly worked. The text describes how two options were brought to the Lord, and by selecting either the Urim or the Thummim, the answer would be revealed. The King James Version does not give much clarity on this, but if we use the New International Version (which uses the Septuagint version of the Old Testament) the text states, “Then Saul prayed to the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Why have you not answered your servant today? If the fault is in me or my son Jonathan, *respond with Urim*, but if the men of Israel are at fault, *respond with Thummim*.’ Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot, and the men were cleared” (1 Samuel 14:41 New International Version).

This would mean that a yes or no question would be brought to the high priest, and he would then insert his hand into the pocket of the breastplate and draw out one of the two stones, and the answer would depend on which stone was pulled out. We can see several examples of the concept of “casting lots” to receive revelation in scripture. Zacharias was chosen by lot to serve in the temple just prior to receiving the revelation about the birth of his son, John the Baptist (Luke 1:9). After the death of Christ, the Apostles prayed for revelation on who should replace Judas and cast lots to know the will of God between the two options of Barsabas and Matthias (Acts 1:26). Nephi and his brothers cast lots to decide who would go into the house of Laban to attempt to obtain the brass plates (1 Nephi 3:11).

According to Josephus and other Jewish writers, the Urim and Thummim possibly worked by somehow lighting through the breastplate. The light from the Urim and Thummim would project out through the twelve stones, with the engraved letters lighting up to possibly spell some sort of message. This is like descriptions of how Joseph Smith’s seer stone worked, with some witnesses describing that the stone lit up and letters appeared.

Many may see these forms of receiving revelation as strange or odd, yet any ancient seeing us in modern times staring at a lit-up phone or computer would likely think the same of us. The simple fact is, the Lord throughout history has used everything from stones to metal boxes we call mobile devices for delivering inspiration and guidance.

## Exodus 28:31–35

The third golden garment for the high priest was called the robe of the ephod, or the blue robe. The robe was made of the same blue as was used in the gate, coverings, door, and veil of the tabernacle. Blue could be associated with heaven and could symbolize that the power of the high priest originated from God. It also was the same blue that was worn by all Israelite men on the four corners of their clothing (Numbers 15:38–41). These four blue tassels were to be a constant reminder of the commandments in the Torah and were to connect every Israelite with the high priest, the tabernacle gate, door, and veil. Wearing the priestly color blue reminded Israel that they were a “kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:6).

The hole for the neck of the robe was not to be rent or cut, which likely means that the hole was made during the weaving or looming process. Josephus stated that this robe was to be seamless (implied here in this verse), which would add to the cost and effort of creating the fabric.<sup>11</sup> As previously mentioned, Jesus Christ wore a seamless robe at the Crucifixion (John 19:23).



*The bottom of the blue robe*

At the bottom of the blue robe were alternating golden bells and pomegranate-shaped tassels made of blue, purple, and scarlet wool threads. The scriptures state that the purpose of the bells was that the bells would be heard when the high priest entered the Holy Place. Because Israelites could not enter the tabernacle structure, as they heard the bells ring, they would know that the high priest was acting on their behalf. A later tradition states that on the Day of Atonement, a rope was tied to the foot of the high priest, and if the bells no longer rang, the people knew

that the high priest had possibly died. They then could drag out the body. The tying of the rope to the ankle is a false tradition since the text here directly states that the bells were on the robe so the priest could be heard while in the Holy Place. Moreover, when the high priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he wore only the white linen garments (see Leviticus 16:4), meaning he would not have the blue robe with bells as he entered the Holy of Holies.

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<sup>11</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston, book III, chapter 7, paragraph 4, <https://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/ant-3.html>.



The pomegranate was one of the fruits brought back by the twelve spies from Canaan (Numbers 13:23), and thus a fruit of the promised land. It was also often a symbol of posterity and prosperity because of the hundreds of seeds it bore. It well could have functioned as a symbol of the Abrahamic covenant of property (the promised land) and posterity. We should remember that it is through Christ, the Great High Priest, that the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant are fulfilled.

### **Exodus 28:36–38**

The final piece of the golden garments of the high priest is the golden crown. The crown was not like a traditional royal crown (going all the way around the head and covering the top) but instead was a small plate that was held on by two blue straps tied in the back. Engraved on the plate of gold were the words “Holiness to the Lord.” This is where the phrase that adorns modern Latter-day Saint temples comes from. In fact, anciently the tabernacle and other temples would not have this wording on the façade; therefore it is only from the high priest’s crown that we have this wording.



*The crown of the high priest*

Exodus states, “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” (Exodus 28:38 English Standard Version; emphasis added).

This verse indicates that the crown made the high priest holy or “set apart” so that he could bear the guilt of the people. Aaron (and all later high priests) were sinful (since Christ is the only sinless man ever to live), thus the crown seems to symbolize that it is only through a holy life that one can approach God. Because the high priest was considered holy through his office, he hallowed, or made holy, the gifts (sacrifices) brought forth by the children of Israel.

From the Bible we learn that Jesus Christ is the true “great High Priest” (see Hebrews 4:14). Just as the high priest went before the Lord to intercede before God, so Jesus the Messiah goes before God and

intercedes on our behalf. Jesus was of royal blood (of the lineage of King David); thus, the crown could also represent the royal lineage of Christ as the true King of kings. The words “holiness to the Lord” represent the life of the Savior. Because of His sinless life, He makes our gifts (or our sacrifices that we bring to the altar of God) holy and acceptable to God.



*The clothing of the priest*

### **Exodus 28:39–43**

Remember, the priests and Levites wore four pieces of clothing: the breeches or undergarments, the coat or robe, the girdle or sash, and the bonnet or turban. Each of these was to be made of fine twined white linen fabric.

By wearing these sacred garments, the priests showed that they had been consecrated and authorized to act on behalf of Israel. Similar to a judge wearing judicial robes, or a graduate wearing a graduation gown, the priests’ donning or being dressed in these robes symbolically conveyed a sense of power and authority. The robes themselves do not give authority; they simply show that the wearer has been given authority by a higher power.

As part of this process of becoming authorized to act on behalf of Israel, Moses was to dress Aaron and his sons in the robes and then anoint and consecrate them. This process is described in greater detail in Exodus 40:12–16 and Leviticus 8:23–24.

### **Exodus 29:1–3**

With the description of the priestly clothing in Exodus 28 complete, the Lord now instructs Moses how to consecrate Aaron and his sons preparatory to officiating on behalf of the people. This consecration process involved washing, clothing, and anointing. This ritual was to demonstrate to the people that the priests (Aaron and his sons) now represented the people. This process is similar to swearing in a judge or a student’s graduation. These rituals include someone of higher authority bestowing power or rights on that individual, often illustrated through a ritual of being clothed in a robe. This signifies that this person has now been set apart for certain rights or responsibilities.

As part of the process, Moses was to sacrifice of a young bull (bullock) and two rams. These animals were to be “without blemish,” meaning they were to be complete and without deformities, pointing to the perfection

of the Savior. Bulls were seen as a symbol of power and strength, while the ram was reminiscent of the ram caught in the thicket (Genesis 22:13)—both apt symbols for Christ. The death of these animals as part of the consecration was a reminder to the priests that they were only able to act on behalf of the people because of the shedding of blood. It also can be a reminder to us, as we serve in temples, at church, and in our homes, that as imperfect saints, we only serve as representatives of the Lord through His Atonement.

Moses was also to offer three types of unleavened bread: (1) plain unleavened bread, (2) unleavened bread mixed with olive oil, and (3) unleavened bread with olive oil poured (anointed) on top. Leaven (or products with yeast) are susceptible to molding and thus were symbolic of corruption. The process of creating olive oil requires incredible pressure in an olive press (*gethsemane* in Hebrew) and thus is a type of Christ's suffering in Gethsemane. Perhaps the unleavened bread (a symbol of purity), anointed both on the inside and outside, was to demonstrate to the priests how they must live lives of purity and that Christ's Atonement was to permeate their souls, both inwardly and outwardly.

### **Exodus 29:4**

After preparing the animals and unleavened bread as an offering, Moses was to wash Aaron and his sons at the “door of the tabernacle.” The door refers to the curtain or divider that separated the outer courtyard from the tabernacle proper (the entrance to the Holy Place). The bronze laver, where the washing took place, was just in front of the door to the tabernacle. The laver was a large basin used for ritual washing.

The Bible does not mention what the washing involved, but the ceremony likely would have included much of the body. Because Exodus 29:5 mentions that Moses was to dress the priests in all the pieces of clothing except the undergarments, it is likely that they were already wearing the breeches during the washing process.

The washing ritual would be more about symbolism, pouring water from the basin on at least the head, hands, and feet, and less about the actual removal of dirt. Anciently, washing with water often symbolized becoming ritually clean, which allowed the person to perform sacred acts such as prayer or sacrifice. The scriptures include many references to ritual washing, including “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Psalms 51:2).

### **Exodus 29:5–6**

Once washed with water, Aaron and his sons were prepared to be clothed with the holy garments of the priesthood (described in Exodus 28). The priests wore four pieces of clothing, all made from white linen: the undergarments, the coat or robe, the girdle or sash, and the mitre/bonnet or turban.

The high priest (Aaron being the first) wore four additional pieces of clothing that distinguished him from the normal priest: the robe of the ephod, a blue outer robe with bells and pomegranate-shaped tassels on the bottom hem; the ephod, an elaborate, colorful apron-like garment; the breastplate, an embroidered cloth vestment with twelve stones; and the holy crown, a gold plate fastened to the head with blue ribbons with the words “Holiness to the Lord” on it.

As undergarments are not mentioned in this list, it is likely that Aaron and his sons wore these prior to the ceremony of being dressed.

The Hebrew word *kethoneth* (“coat” or in other words, the priestly robe) is used twenty-nine times in the Old Testament and most often refers to the priestly clothing; however, two stories that use this same Hebrew word can be instructive as to the meaning behind this sacred clothing.

First is the story of Adam and Eve and the “coats of skins” they were dressed in by the Lord (Genesis 3:21). Though the story does not mention where these coats of skins came from, it would seem likely that they came from the skins of the first animal offered by the Lord to teach Adam and Eve of sacrifice. These coats were to represent that the shame of being found naked (and thus the guilt of their transgression) was now covered over. The Hebrew word *kaphar*, which we translate as “atonement,” means simply “to cover.”

Similarly, these coats given to the priests were to represent that it was only through the Atonement of Christ that they could be clean and pure (represented by the white linen). It showed that they had been set apart, with special powers and privileges to now act on behalf of the people.

The second story that uses the same word used for the priestly “coat” is of the coat of many colors given to Joseph by his father, Jacob. This beautiful coat represented Joseph’s special favor or status as the birth-right son. Thus, Moses dressing and giving the priests a *kethoneth*, or coat, could show their special status and position as servants of the Lord who act on behalf of all Israel.

### **Exodus 29:7**

After being washed and clothed, Aaron and his sons were anointed with oil. It is likely either that this took place prior to placing the turban on their head or that the turban was removed momentarily for the anointing. The oil was a special combination of myrrh (one of the gifts brought by the wise men), cinnamon, other spices, and olive oil (Exodus 30:23–25). The oil was likely stored in an animal horn (often a symbol of power or strength; see 1 Samuel 16:13).

Olive oil was highly significant in ancient times. It was used as a source of light in homes and the temple and for healing, cooking, and of course, anointing someone to be a prophet, priest, or king. The form of production is insightful: At harvest time, the olives were picked and then crushed by a large round crushing stone. This process turned the olives into a thick mash that was then scooped into woven bags that were placed under the olive press. The crushed olive mash was then pressed down by a huge amount of pressure from heavy weights, the first olive oil came out a vivid red because of the combined crushed olive seeds and oil.

Each of these symbols points to Christ. Before His crucifixion the Savior suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane (the word *gethsemane* means “olive press” in Hebrew, so it was the garden of the olive press). There He was pressed down by the sins and sorrows of the world, which caused blood to come from every pore. It is through this process of Christ’s Atonement that we can receive the light of the gospel, healing, nourishment, and anointing power. Because of His suffering, we all can be forgiven of our sins, able to be anointed as kings and queens and priests and priestesses and able to inherit all that the Father has.

Exodus 29:7 says that the oil was poured on the head, while verses 20–21 describe how oil (in addition to blood) was also sprinkled on Aaron and his clothing. Though we don’t really know how this sprinkling of oil was performed, it is possible that it was done in a similar fashion to the sprinkling or covering of blood explained in verse 20: “Then shalt thou kill the ram, and take of his blood, and put it upon the tip of the right ear of Aaron, and upon the tip of the right ear of his sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot.” Thus, in addition to pouring the oil on the head, it is possible that this sprinkling entailed covering certain parts of Aaron’s body, such as his ear, thumb, and toe. For additional information on this process, refer to the commentary on verses 19–20.

### **Exodus 29:8–9**

After Aaron was washed, clothed, and anointed, Moses repeated the whole process with Aaron’s sons (the priests). A significant difference is that Aaron’s sons were only dressed in the white linen clothing and not in the beautiful colorful garments of the high priest.

The wording “and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons” can actually be translated as “thou shalt fill the hand of Aaron and the hand of his sons.” The Hebrew wording implies a symbolic opening of the hand to receive authority or a divine commission from God.<sup>12</sup> Just as a child holds their hand open for a gift from their parent, this Hebrew word for *consecrate* symbolizes the Lord’s bestowal of a gift of great power into the open hands of Aaron and his sons.

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<sup>12</sup> William H. C. Propp, *The Anchor Bible: Exodus 19–40* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006), 452.

Several examples of carved cupped hands as part of ancient temple worship have been found. These artifacts often have a rod-like handle with a cupped hand at the end. Incense was often burned in these hands.

### **Exodus 29:10–14**

The first of the three sacrifices as part of the consecration process for Aaron and his sons was the sin offering of the bullock—a young bull. Anciently, bulls were seen as a symbol of power and strength because of their ability to work the land and to pull and carry heavy loads. This beast of burden is an apt type for the Savior, who has borne and carried our sorrows and sins upon Him. Because Aaron and his sons had sinned, the death of this animal brought about a symbolic remission of sin, enabling them to stand clean before the Lord as they officiated on behalf of the people.

As part of this sacrifice, Aaron and his sons were to place their hands on the head of the bull, symbolically transferring their sins to the animal. The verse is not clear about who killed the animal; however, it was normally not the officiant (Moses in this case). Instead, the offerer for whom the sacrifice was made killed the animal. In this case, it would have been Aaron and his sons. This would be a powerful reminder to them that the only way they could act for the people was through the death of an animal, foreshadowing Jesus’s death for our sins.

Once killed, the blood of the bull was put on the four horns of the altar of sacrifice and poured out at the base. The horn is often a symbol of power, and the word *atonement* in Hebrew actually means “to cover,” thus potentially representing the power of Christ’s Atonement to cover over, or blot out, the sins of the priests. The Savior likely alluded to the blood poured out as part of sacrifices at the Last Supper when He stated, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24 New International Version).

Though the Lord did not explain why the fat was to be burned, it is possible that because fatty meat was anciently seen as the best part of the animal, this would be a symbol of offering the best to the Lord. The remaining meat, skin, and dung of the bull was to be burned outside the camp. The author of Hebrews alluded to this when he taught, “Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach” (Hebrews 13:12–13).

### **Exodus 29:15–18**

The second of the three sacrifices was a ram, offered as a burnt offering. The ram points back to the “ram caught in the thicket” that was sacrificed by Abraham in place of Isaac (Genesis 22:13). A burnt offering was fully consumed by fire, symbolizing the complete devotion and commitment to the Lord by the offerer.

As with the sin offering of the bull (see Exodus 29:10–14), Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the animal, slit the throat and drained the blood into a dish, and then sprinkled the blood on the altar.

Because the entire animal had to be burned as part of a burnt offering, the sacrifice was cut into smaller pieces and washed. The washing would help to remove the dung, making it easier to burn. This full offering by the priests showed their full devotion as servants of the Lord.

This ram, fully burned on the altar of sacrifice, pointed to Christ. The Savior offered His whole soul to be sacrificed for our benefit. Jesus left nothing undone, and as the only sinless human, He was a pure and clean sacrifice.

### **Exodus 29:19–20**

The third sacrifice offered as part of the sanctification process for Aaron and his sons was a second ram. Like with the young bull and the first ram, Aaron and his sons were to place their hands on the head of the ram, symbolically transferring their sins to the animal. Scholar William Propp suggested that by laying their hands on the head of the animal, the priests symbolically shed their own blood because of their sins, and the Lord then restored their blood back to them through the sacrifice at the altar.<sup>13</sup> This was a powerful reminder to the priests of the need for a life to be given because of their sins.

Moses then was to take and dab the shed blood of the ram on the right ear, thumb, and large toe of Aaron and his sons. It is important to remember that the word *atone*, or *kaphar* in Hebrew, means “to cover.” Thus, atonement is literally being made as the blood is “covering” certain parts of the body. Though this ritual of placing blood on certain parts of the body might seem quite strange, the symbolism is extremely powerful.

Placing the blood on the right ear could be a symbol of the sanctification of the priest’s ability to hear the word of God and to hearken to His commands. Since hearing was the primary way to receive the law for ancients (the ability to read was uncommon), the ear was an apt symbol for how one was instructed by the Lord.

The blood on the right thumb could represent the cleansing of the priest’s hands. This was important because his hands were the main way in which the priest executed the various sacrifices and ordinances. The Hebrew word for “hand,” *yad*, also can mean “power,” such as in the phrase “the hand of God.” The right hand was also the favored hand for covenant making and bestowing favor, evident in the importance of being on the “right hand” of God.

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<sup>13</sup> William H. C. Propp, *The Anchor Bible: Exodus 19–40* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006), 462.

The right large toe could be a symbol for the path the priests took, representing that they were to follow the counsel they received from the Lord. The large toe is used for balance while walking, perhaps reminding the priests that as they “acknowledge[d] him” in all their ways, the Lord “[directed their] paths” (Proverbs 3:6).

In essence, as part of this ritual of sanctification, when the priests symbolically took on the tokens of the sacrifice, the blood literally covered them (or made atonement). With this act and the full consecration process, they were able to act on behalf of Israel as they served at the tabernacle.

### **Exodus 29:21**

Next, Moses was to take the blood and anointing oil and sprinkle it upon Aaron and his sons and their clothing. It is not clear if the blood was mixed with the oil or was kept separate. Some scholars have suggested that the order could represent that first, they were sanctified or purified of sin by the blood and then, once purified, were consecrated by the anointing. This process can be seen in many rituals such as the bestowal of the gift of the Holy Ghost and the initiatory. First we are cleansed by baptism, or water, then we are given the gift or endowment of power.

The sprinkling of blood and oil on the clothing sanctified the sacred garments so that the wearer would now be able to use these clothes in the work of the Lord. It was also meant to be a constant reminder to the priests of the connection between their sacred clothing, the sanctifying blood, and anointing oil. On the Day of Atonement, blood was also sprinkled on various parts of the tabernacle, including the veil, perhaps further connecting the clothing and the various parts of the tabernacle (as has already been discussed).

### **Exodus 29:22–25**

Next, the priests were to take certain parts of the third sacrifice (the second ram) and offer them on the altar to the Lord. This included the fat (often considered one of the best parts of the animal), the fat of the tail (also a delicacy), the kidneys with their fat, and the rump (or thigh). These better parts of the animal were offered to the Lord.

As already mentioned in the commentary for Exodus 29:1–3, three groups of unleavened bread were then offered: (1) plain unleavened bread, (2) unleavened bread mixed with olive oil, and (3) unleavened bread with olive oil poured (anointed) on top.



These parts of the ram and the three loaves were waved before the Lord by the priests and then burned on the altar. Waving the offering likely meant that the priests took the sacrifice in their hands and waved it or moved it back and forth between the offerers (the priests) and the altar. This presumably represented the act of symbolically transferring the offering from the priest to the Lord.

### **Exodus 29:26–32**

As the final part of the consecration process, Aaron and his sons then take the remaining parts of the ram, including the breast, and wave it before the Lord (as they did with the previous offering). This likely symbolically transferred the offering from the priests to the Lord and then from the Lord back to the priests through the waving motion. In essence, the Lord accepted the sacrifice and then returned a portion to them so that they could partake of it as part of the consecration ceremony. The priests were to cook and eat the meal at a holy place in the outer courtyard.

This communal meal of the remaining ram and unleavened bread was highly significant. Anciently, breaking bread and eating a meal together often symbolized the establishment of a covenant to show that enemies were now at peace. One only broke bread (or had a meal) with those he or she trusted; thus, the Lord's invitation to the priests to enter His home (the tabernacle) and partake of a meal with Him (the Lord partook His portion through the act of burning on the altar) could symbolize that the priests were now at peace with God. They came as enemies (because of their sins), but through the deaths of the sacrifices, they now are forgiven.

This act of partaking in a meal with the Lord is reminiscent of the sacrament, or communion. Like these sacrifices that were cut into various pieces, the bread is torn by the priests and distributed in a holy place (a chapel or approved location). Because of our sins, we also come as enemies to the Lord each Sabbath, but through the breaking of bread, we establish a covenant of peace and become at one with the Father because of the death of the Lamb of God. Through this weekly rite of sanctification, we signal our willingness to accept the Atonement of Christ.

### **Exodus 29:33–37**

The process of sanctification for Aaron and his sons was to last seven days. The number seven in the Bible often represents completion or perfection. The earth was not complete or perfect until the seventh day or period of Creation. The week is likewise not perfect or complete until the Sabbath. Thus for seven days, the sanctification process continued for the priests.

This can be a lesson to us as we work through our own process of sanctification (symbolized by the priests qualifying to represent ancient Israel). We must remember that it takes time to become complete—perfection does not come from just a single rite or ordinance. Our lives are a continual process wherein each seven days, we renew our commitment to the Lord and remember Him through the communal meal of the sacrament. As we pursue being complete, we, like the priests, take on the symbols of the sacrifice of Christ as we partake of the bread and wine (or water).

### **Exodus 29:38–42**

The Lord now moves from discussing the sanctification process of the priests to explaining the daily sacrifices offered by the priests. These daily sacrifices (offered each morning and evening) included four main elements: a sacrificed lamb, flour, beaten oil, and wine. Each of these elements strongly foreshadows the Savior.

The lamb was to be a yearling and was burned completely (except the skins) on the altar as a burnt offering. Christ is the Lamb of God who was slain for the sins of the world (John 1:29). Only because of His complete and full sacrifice can we become clean and able to enter the presence of the Lord (represented by the tabernacle precinct). If a lamb were slain each morning and evening every day, a total of 730 lambs would be killed each year just for the daily sacrifices. This count does not include the number of lambs and other animals killed for the many other types of sacrifices that would have taken place at the tabernacle. Lambs were by far the most common animal slaughtered on the altar. This could point to our ever-present need—day and night for all our lives—for the cleansing power of the Lamb lives.

The flour (about a quart) and oil (about three cups) were combined to make paste-like cakes that were burned on the altar. The flour offered at the temple was to be the finest flour, ground down and sifted until it was the highest quality. The Savior is called the Bread of Life (John 6:35), meaning that He nourishes us and gives us daily strength as we work to become more like Him. The oil can be a reminder of the Lord's suffering in Gethsemane (place of the olive press), where He was pressed down by our sins—causing Him to bleed from every pore.

The wine was poured out at the base of the altar as a “drink offering.” The wine and cakes can be a reminder of the wine (or water) and bread of the communion or sacrament. Even though we take the emblems of Christ's sacrifice only once a week, we are to “always” remember it (Moroni 4:3; 5:2)—perhaps reminiscent of the daily morning and evening sacrifice. The Lord promised that He would meet with and speak with Israel in the tabernacle; this brings to mind the sacramental promise that as we remember the Savior, we will “always have his spirit to be with us” (Moroni 4:3; 5:2).

## **Exodus 29:43–46**

The Lord again declared that the tabernacle would be the place where His presence dwelled. He personally would sanctify the tabernacle, altar, and Aaron and his sons so that they could minister on behalf of the people. Christ did come to the earth to sanctify each of us. Because of His death and Atonement (symbolized through the tabernacle rituals), we are promised by the Lord that we will know that He is the Lord our God and that He has brought us out of our own “land of Egypt.” John taught, “And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14 Young’s Literal Translation).

## **Exodus 30:1–5**

The Lord next described the altar of incense. This altar was similar to the altar of sacrifice: Both were made from acacia wood, were square, were covered in metal (one in bronze, the other in gold), were four-horned, and had rings and staves for transporting. This altar was essentially a smaller yet costlier version as it was covered with gold. One major difference was that instead of burning animals on this altar, only incense was burned here.

These two altars might represent how the high priest (representing all of Israel) must offer different types of sacrifices as he progressed through the tabernacle. The priest first offered sacrifices of animals—representing that only through death can sin be remitted. It could also symbolize how we must be willing to place our sins on the altar, confessing them before God, and then allow the blood of Christ to cover over them, or blot them out. Killing, draining the blood, and burning the animal would not be a pleasant experience. Similarly, the required agony of Christ’s Atonement is not something that brought joy to the Father. Yet, this first step of sacrifice is a critical part of our journey back to God.

Once the priest had offered Israel’s sins up to God and been cleansed through the Atonement (represented both at the altar and the laver), he then entered a more holy and sacred room of the tabernacle, where he offered a second type of sacrifice. This offering was sweet smelling and fragrant, far more pleasant to the Lord than the death of an innocent animal. This could represent offerings of service, devotion, and consecrated talents to the Lord to bless others. While the first altar was focused on far more personal aspects of sins, the second altar seemed to point to a holier and higher offering.



*The altar of incense*

### **Exodus 30:6–8**

This second altar was located directly in front of the veil that divided the Holy Place from the most sacred part of the temple, the Holy of Holies. Just on the other side of this veil was the ark of the covenant, where the presence of the Lord dwelled. The Lord commanded Moses that twice each day, Aaron was to burn incense on this altar. This timing would correlate with the daily morning and evening sacrifices. Psalm 141:2 states, “Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.” Every day the priest entered the tabernacle, burned the incense, and while raising his hands to the Lord, prayed a blessing over all of Israel.

Though Exodus states that only Aaron was to offer the incense, by the time of Christ the responsibility had been assigned to the priests who were chosen by lot (Luke 1:9). It is here, next to the altar of incense in the temple of Herod, that Zacharias had his vision of the angel Gabriel foretelling the birth of his son, John the Baptist (Luke 1:10–20). Here at this altar, Zacharias (and any priest assigned) was to pray for the blessings of the Lord upon Israel. How appropriate that here, just before the veil of the temple, the promised blessing of the forerunner of Jesus Christ was foretold. Perhaps there is no better place or situation for this remarkable announcement to have been made.

It is also powerful to consider that at least by the time of the New Testament, three o’clock p.m. was the designated time for the evening prayer (Acts 3:1), and it was at three o’clock p.m. when Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27:46). This draws one more possible connection to Christ. It should remind us that because of Christ’s offering on the cross, our prayers can be answered before the Father (symbolized by the burning incense).

### **Exodus 30:9–10**

Only the proper combination of spices (which will be described in verses 34–35) was to be offered on the altar. In Leviticus 10:1, we learn that because two of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered strange fire on this altar, they were struck down and consumed by fire. This story is a stark reminder of the need to follow the command of the Lord, especially in His holy temple.

In addition, Moses was told that once each year, on the Day of Atonement, Aaron was to take blood from the sacrifice and cover the four horns as part of the ritual. This could symbolize that Christ’s Atonement has power (the symbol of the horn) to cover the entire earth (represented by the four horns, or the four corners of the earth). This was a yearly reminder that only through the shedding of blood could the prayers of Israel, offered at this altar, be heard and answered by the Lord. It was a yearly symbolic purification act for this sacred altar.

## **Exodus 30:11–16**

These verses describe how Moses was to require a ransom price of a half shekel of silver from each male over twenty years of age. Although scholars debate why this ransom price had to be paid by Israel and what “atonement for your souls” means, it possibly refers to the sin of worshipping the golden calf. For whatever reason, Israel needed to be ransomed before they could begin the process of building the tabernacle. This price provided that ransom.

This half shekel tax of silver would become a literal and critical part of the tabernacle structure, in particular as part of the ninety-six large silver bases that made up the foundation of the main structure (see commentary for Exodus 26:19–21). This would mean that the entire foundation of the tabernacle was built upon the foundation of the silver from the ransom price. It is possible that this foreshadowed the thirty pieces of silver that Judas was paid to betray the Lord (Matthew 26:15). Just as the tabernacle was built upon a foundation of a ransom price, so too the Atonement of Christ involved a price of silver.

It also appears that this “temple tax” was a passive way for Moses to count Israel without counting Israel. The Lord had commanded Moses not to directly count Israel, but in this way, Moses could still know their number by simply counting the donations. Scholars debate the meaning of this counting, but whatever the interpretation, it did provide for the eventual foundation of the building of the tabernacle.

## **Exodus 30:17–21**

The final piece of furniture described was the bronze laver. The fact that it was discussed last and with the least detail possibly shows the lesser significance of this piece of furniture (in comparison to the other pieces). The bronze laver was made from the bronze mirrors donated by the Israelite women (see Exodus 38:8). These mirrors would not be like today’s mirrors, but instead, they were a poured slab of bronze that was then polished to provide a small amount of reflection. These mirrors either were melted down or possibly hammered into shape to create the laver. The faithful women who donated their bronze showed their great devotion to the Lord by offering a valuable possession so that the laver could be constructed.



*The bronze laver*

The laver was filled with water to be used by the priests as they ritually washed in preparation to serve in the tabernacle. The washing that took place was far more ritualistic in nature and not just for removing

dirt from the hands (though that of course also happened as they washed). The Lord commanded that this washing was to take place before they entered the Holy Place or before they served at the altar of sacrifice. The washing likely was performed by dipping a ladle into the basin of water and pouring the water over the priests' hands and feet before serving the Lord. The hands and feet would need to be washed because they would be the most likely parts of the body to have touched or trod on impurity.

The laver was also the location where Aaron and his sons were washed, clothed, and anointed before becoming ordained as high priest and priests. Washing at the laver could be seen as a type of baptism in that it symbolically showed that through the cleansing power of the water (a symbol of the Atonement of Christ) the priest (and we) are now able to do the work of the Lord.

### **Exodus 30:22–33**

The anointing oil used to consecrate Aaron and his sons was made by combining the four spices myrrh, cinnamon, sweet calamus, and cassia with olive oil. There is debate about how this was done, but some scholars have proposed that the dry spices were added to water and oil and boiled until the water evaporated, leaving only the oil. This would, in essence, infuse the four spices into the olive oil, creating a fragrant anointment.

It is significant that myrrh was one of the main spices used and made up one-third of the total spices used (myrrh, 500 shekels; cinnamon 250, shekels; sweet calamus 250 shekels; and cassia, 500 shekels). Myrrh was one of the gifts brought by the wise men to the baby Jesus (Matthew 2:11) and was used in the burial process of the Savior (John 19:39). Myrrh was harvested by repeatedly gouging or piercing the *Commiphora myrrha* (myrrh) tree. From these wounds, sap or resin would ooze out which was eventually harvested by breaking the resin from the tree after it had dried. A powerful symbol is of Christ as the tree of life, bruised or wounded because our sins (Isaiah 53:5) so that we might be anointed with oil (Psalm 23:5) and healed through His suffering. It truly is because of His suffering that we can be washed, anointed, and clothed in the power of His Atonement, then able and worthy to officiate in His work.

### **Exodus 30:26–33**

This special combination of incense and olive oil was then used to anoint, or to make holy, the various pieces of the tabernacle. The order follows the order described in the previous chapters pertaining to the furniture, beginning with the ark of the covenant, then moving to the table of showbread, the menorah, the altar of incense, the altar of sacrifice, and finally to the laver. The order again shows how the Lord started with the most holy (the ark of the covenant) and ended with the less holy furniture. It also shows the importance of the priests; they too are anointed with the same fragrant oil as even the ark of the covenant!

This anointing set apart these normal pieces of furniture and elevated them to being sacred and holy pieces in the holy tent of the Lord.

### **Exodus 31:1–11**

The Lord taught Moses that He had raised up craftsmen (like Bezaleel, Aholiab, and others) and gave them gifts that would help not only in constructing the tabernacle but also in teaching others this gift. It is likely that Bezaleel and Aholiab learned their skills while enslaved in Egypt, working as artisans on the wonders there. Here we see that the Lord used these painful lessons to make craftsmen that could bless the lives of the Israelites. We see the same with the Savior, from whose agonizing suffering and death and glorious resurrection came life eternal. The Lord always has the power to turn the tragic and painful moments of life into momentous blessings for His children.

### **Exodus 31:12–17**

It is interesting to note that the very last thing that the Lord taught as part of His command to build the tabernacle was to honor the Sabbath. Perhaps the Lord wanted to help the people to know that even though they may have been eager to build this sacred structure, they had to remember that they should rest on the seventh day—even from constructing the tabernacle. The prohibition of kindling a fire (mentioned in the Exodus 35:1–3 account when Moses gave this same command to the people) would not only apply to the fires they might build at their (tent) homes on the Sabbath but also to the fires needed to forge the gold, silver, and brass for the tabernacle.

### **Exodus 31:18**

The final act of the Lord on Mount Sinai was to give Moses the two tables of stone engraved with the law by the very finger of God. It is fitting that as the Lord began with the ark of the covenant (the most sacred piece of furniture in the tabernacle), He ended with giving Moses the Law, which would go inside the ark. Moses destroyed these same tablets in the next chapter (Exodus 32:19) when he saw the people had already broken the first and second commandments by worshiping the golden calf while he was on the mountain.

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