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C0702 – January 10, 2007 – Ex 25:23-40 – The Furniture Of The Holy Place

So far we have only looked at two things with respect to the Tabernacle. First, the contributions given to build the Tabernacle (25:1-9). This was a free-will contribution that was to come from the people's hearts and not by force or compulsion. It was to come out of the wealth that Israel received from Egypt on the night of the Passover. Second, the design of the Ark of the Covenant, (25:10-22). The Ark is the first and most important piece of furniture in the Tabernacle. It is the only thing in the Most Holy Place. It was the place Israel's national atonement took place on the *kipporeth* each year on Yom Kippur. This would provide ritual cleansing so they could remain in the presence of the Shechinah Glory and so the Shechinah Glory could dwell among them.

Tonight we will look in the Holy Place where we find three articles of golden furniture: (1) the table of showbread (bread), (2) the golden lampstand (light), and (3) the altar of incense (prayer).ⁱ The table of the showbread was placed on the north side, the golden lampstand on the south side, and the altar of incense directly in front of the Most Holy Place (LOGOS TOUR OF THE TABERNACLE).

2. The Table of the Bread of the Presence (25:23-30)

Exodus 25:23-30 “You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long and one cubit wide and one and a half cubits high. “You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a gold border around it. “You shall make for it a rim of a handbreadth around *it*; and you shall make a gold border for the rim around it. “You shall make four gold rings for it and put rings on the four

corners which are on its four feet. “The rings shall be close to the rim as holders for the poles to carry the table. “You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold, so that with them the table may be carried. “You shall make its dishes and its pans and its jars and its bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold. “You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times.



The Hebrew word for **table** is *sulhan* and traditionally referred to a piece of leather laid out on the floor to be used as a **table**. Here it speaks of a golden **table**. It, like the Ark was made by the expert craftsman “Bezalel” who was filled with the Spirit of God for this unique task (Exod 37:10-16). It had a golden molding around it, probably a garland of flowers or leaves about 4 inches wide, so it would match the Ark of the Covenant.

It was 36 inches long, 18 inches wide and 27 inches high. Like the Ark it was made of **acacia wood** which comes from the *shittah tree* and was common in their wilderness environment. Like the Ark it was to be **overlaid with pure gold**. This was done by hammering out plates of gold and then nailing them to the acacia wood with small nails (Cassuto, 329). Like the Ark it had **four gold rings on the four corners**. These were actually at the base so that the table would not rest on the ground but on the **four gold rings**. The **rings** were for the purpose of inserting poles so it could be carried on the shoulders of the priests. The **poles** were also to be made of **acacia wood** overlaid with **gold**. Because of the holiness of God the articles inside were made of the most precious metal. “The tabernacle was built on a ratio of 2:1 and on a radiating decrease value of metal: gold, silver, bronze, from the center [where God dwelt] to the outer edges.” This **table** was placed on the north side of the Holy Place (show diagram).

Accompanying the **table** were several furnishings made of solid gold and used to **pour drink offerings**. There were **dishes** or better, “large platters” and **pans** or small platters and **jars** or beakers **and bowls** or chalices **with which to pour drink offerings**. These drink offerings were never offered in the Holy Place but outside on the altar.

Verse 30. “**You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times**. Literally “bread of the face” because it was set before the face of God whose presence filled the Tabernacle. Pagans also set food before their gods because they thought the gods had the same nature as men and needed to eat. This bread was not set before the face of God because He needed to eat but because He provides sustenance. The bread was baked by the Kohathites, a subset of the Levites in pans so the bread all had the same shape (1 Chron 9:31-32).ⁱⁱ On the Sabbath the new bread would be placed on the table at the same time the old bread was removed so it was on the table perpetually before the presence of God. The twelve loaves were stacked in two racks of six. The old bread was still considered holy and was given to the priests to eat (Lev 24:5-9). Rabbinic tradition claims that by a miracle of God the loaves remained hot and fresh all week. “It was this holy bread that the priest Ahimelech allowed David to eat because of his urgent need.”ⁱⁱⁱ

According to Josephus a table of showbread was in the Temple during the time of Christ.^{iv} When Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed in 70AD this item was taken with Titus back to Rome. It is portrayed on the Victory Arch of Titus as one of the spoils of war along with the Silver Trumpets.

Significance of the Showbread. The commentary literature on the significance of the three articles we are studying tonight all give varying interpretations. When you find little agreement on such details it is probably because they are not literal interpretations. Some argue that the minutest details typify something of the person or work of Christ. Others give no typical explanation at all. Because there are such a diversity of opinions I will limit my investigation to the key feature.

With the table of the showbread the key feature is the **bread**. Bread is the most basic food. It provides nourishment for the body. The **bread** here may typify four truths. *First*, it may typify that Christ is the true bread. He

provides spiritual food in the form of the word of God. As Jesus said, “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word which proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4 quoting Deut 8:3). The word of God is spiritual nourishment. The human body needs physical bread to be nourished and to grow and the human spirit needs spiritual bread in order to be nourished and to grow. If you don’t feed your body it will wither, suffer, become ill and eventually die. If you don’t feed your spirit it will wither, suffer, become ill and eventually die. The food it needs to be nourished and to grow is the word of God. It doesn’t need more music, it doesn’t need the purpose driven life, it doesn’t need an experience, it doesn’t need the emerging church, it needs the word of God. Unfortunately most Christians aren’t feeding their human spirits at all. Their immaterial spirit is on par with the children you see in malnourished parts of the world with bellies bulging. It is a sad state of affairs. American Christians have reached the point where they are unable to feed themselves. That is, they don’t know how or they don’t want to take the word of God and study it and understand it. It’s there, its hot food on the plate right in front of them but they don’t know how to get it from the plate into the mouth and into the stomach or they just don’t want to. The stomachs of American Christians are too full of garbage. That’s a related issue, many can’t stomach the truth. If it somehow by an act of God gets in there they can’t handle it. It upsets the stomach. We end of rejecting it, vomiting it up. And this is the sad state of affairs in American Christianity. There’s just no zeal for knowledge, no zeal for the truth among Christians. “Just entertain me! Leave my mind out of it.” Well, the bottom line is that if you don’t feed your human spirit it will wither, suffer, become sick and eventually die. So, Christ provides for your spiritual life with the word of God by which you live. *Second*, the twelve loaves of bread signified the 12 tribes of Israel and God provided one loaf for each tribe.^v That is, He provides equally. For the Church this indicates that He doesn’t provide more spiritual food for some and less for others. He’s an equal opportunity provider. Why then are there differences among us? If He provides equally then why are some more spiritual than others? Why are some more mature than others? Why do we find in the Bible people of different degrees of maturity? Two reasons. One, because some of us have been in the Christian walk longer than others. Two, because we each have a human volition. You can go positive or negative to the word. You can study the word or watch TV. You can buy resources to help you study the word or you can buy another outfit. It just goes on and on. The bottom line is the Lord provides the word of God equally for all but believers

don't exercise the same positive volition to the word of God. A few, very few settle down and concentrate on the word of God, but most don't study the word of God, they are too lazy to study the word of God, too weak minded to concentrate on the word of God and they're doing nothing about it. That's why there's difference. The believer has to be positive to the word of God and has to spend a great deal of time in careful study of the word of God. This is what God expects of the believer. *Third*, the bread was their continually and this portrayed that the Lord was with them continually. This answers the question of how the Lord is able to continually provide equally to all? Because He is continually with us. He is omnipresent; wholly here and there indeed wholly everywhere both in space and time and beyond space and time. He never leaves you nor forsakes you. He is always there. You are never alone. Some believers have to be abandoned by every human being so they will turn to God. This only shows their crutch is people who can't help anyway and who they really need to turn to is God. Well, He's always there. So, we need physical bread but we also need spiritual bread. This bread is that which proceeds from the mouth of God and He provides for each of us equally and continually. It is our responsibility to eat the food He has graciously and abundantly supplied for our human spirit.

3. The Lampstand (25:31-40)

Exodus 25:31-40 “Then you shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand *and* its base and its shaft are to be made of hammered work; its cups, its bulbs and its flowers shall be of *one piece* with it. “Six branches shall go out from its sides; three branches of the lampstand from its one side and three branches of the lampstand from its other side. “Three cups *shall be* shaped like almond *blossoms* in the one branch, a bulb and a flower, and three cups shaped like almond *blossoms* in the other branch, a bulb and a flower—so for six branches going out from the lampstand; and in the lampstand four cups shaped like almond *blossoms*, its bulbs and its flowers. “A bulb shall be under the *first* pair of branches *coming* out of it, and a bulb under the *second* pair of branches *coming* out of it, and a bulb under the *third* pair of branches *coming* out of it, for the six branches coming out of the lampstand. “Their bulbs and their branches *shall be of one piece* with it; all of it shall be one piece

of hammered work of pure gold. “Then you shall make its lamps seven *in number*; and they shall mount its lamps so as to shed light on the space in front of it. “Its snuffers and their trays *shall be* of pure gold. “It shall be made from a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils. “See that you make *them* after the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain.



Some Bible's call this a candlestick but it's actually a lampstand. In the Hebrew it is the *Menorah* and it's a seven branched lampstand. You will find it a very common piece of jewelry. There is also a nine branched lampstand that is not related to the Menorah but to Hanukah. The *Menorah* was also made by Bezalel, an expert craftsman filled by the Spirit for this unique task. It was made of a talent of pure gold. An Israeli talent was between 58 and 80 pounds so this is a lot of gold. The gold alone would be worth between \$5,700,000 and \$8,700,000 in US dollars. This gives you an idea of the wealth of Israel they took from Egypt. So, the contribution they received from the people was quite hefty. Indeed, later on we learn that the people brought too much and had to be turned away.

This was the most ornate piece of furniture having six branches extending out to the sides and one in the center. It was about the height of an average man (18 handbreadths). Everything except the **lamps** were made of the same piece of gold. None of it was fitted together. One **lamp** sat on top of the **flower** at the top of each branch for a total of seven **lamps**. Each morning and evening a priest would tend to the **lamps** adding pure olive **oil** so it would burn perpetually (Lev 24:1-4). It was placed on the south side of the Holy Place across from the table of showbread and its **lamps** were to be positioned so the wicks cast their **light** toward the table. The text also mentions **snuffers** and **trays**. The **snuffers** were like “tweezers” used to remove old wicks. The **trays** would be used to remove the old wicks from the

Tabernacle and possibly to carry the lamps out of the Tabernacle for periodic cleaning. There is debate over whether the branches were curved or went straight out diagonally. There is also debate over the shape of the base, whether it was triangular, hemispherical and whether it had three legs like the ones found at Megiddo and Beth-shean. Josephus says the Menorah carved in the Arch of Titus was based on the design of the Menorah in the Second Temple.

There are not enough details here so verse 30 says Moses should make these things after the pattern he saw on Mt Sinai.^{vi}

The Significance of the Menorah. With the Menorah the key feature is the light. The most basic function of light is to illumine dark places. Thus, the light of the Menorah provided light in the Holy Place so the priests could perform their work. However, just as physical darkness is illuminated by physical light so spiritual darkness is illuminated by spiritual light. All light is sourced in God. The Bible teaches this in six ways. *First*, God is light and in Him is no darkness, not even a bit (1 John 1:5). This speaks of His nature as illuminating or revelatory as well as pure or righteous. The fact that these lamps burned perpetually signified that God is perpetually light and never darkness. *Second*, on day one of creation God caused the light to shine out of the darkness. This was the creation of physical light which illumines man's surroundings. *Third*, Christ is the light of the world (John 1:1-13). That is, He is spiritual light. John 1:9 says He "was the true Light which, coming into the world enlightens every man." Again, light illumines or pierces the darkness and Christ illuminated and pierced the darkness of men's hearts. Those who refuse to come to Christ do so because their deeds are evil and this causes a hardening of the heart which distorts the person and work of Christ. So, the light of the Menorah probably looked forward to the time when the true Light would come into the world to enlighten every man. *Fourth*, in the Dispensation of Israel she was called the light of the world (Matt 5:14). She was not to hide the light of God from the surrounding nations but to let her light shine before men so they would glorify the God in heaven. This was signified also by the fact that in the Temple there were windows in the Holy Place. These windows were not so one could peer in but so that the light could shine out and pierce the darkness of the world. *Fifth*, in the Dispensation of the Church believers who are living in accordance with the word of God are lights in the darkness of the world (Phil 2:15). We should not hide our light

under a bushel but shine our light before men so they too might glorify the God in heaven. We must always remember that the light we may be is always derivative of God. We are never the source of the light. God is the source of light and the light we shine is really derived from Him and reflects Him.

Sixth, the seven churches in Revelation are symbolized by a seven lampstands (Rev 1:20). Each local church composed of true believers is to be a lampstand that sends forth light into the darkness of the world. Without God who is light sending His Son who is the true light into the world the whole world would remain in darkness. This is what the Menorah typified.

The Altar of Incense (30:1-10)

Okay, let's turn to chapter 30 to study the Altar of Incense.

Exodus 30:1-10 “Moreover, you shall make an altar as a place for burning incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. “Its length *shall be* a cubit, and its width a cubit, it shall be square, and its height *shall be* two cubits; its horns *shall be* of one piece with it. “You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top and its sides all around, and its horns; and you shall make a gold molding all around for it. “You shall make two gold rings for it under its molding; you shall make *them* on its two side walls—on opposite sides—and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it. “You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. “You shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over *the ark of* the testimony, where I will meet with you. “Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps. “When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. *There shall be* perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. “You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it. “Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD.”



This was a very important piece. Once more it is made of acacia wood covered with plates of pure gold. Everything inside the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place is made of acacia wood covered in gold or pure gold. This is because it was where Shechinah was present. As you go away from these rooms the metals used in the Tabernacle decrease in value (i.e. silver, bronze...). The incense altar was 18 inches in length, 18 inches in width and 36 inches in height. It had four horns on the top. It also had the molding like the Ark and the table of showbread so all the furniture matched. It was Shechinah's house. It also had gold rings on it so poles made of acacia wood overlaid with gold could be used to carry it. It was placed right **in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony**, that is, on the west side of the Holy Place. Aaron's job was to trim the wicks on the Menorah with the snuffers each morning and evening. When he entered for this service he was also to make sure fragrance was burning perpetually on this altar. The recipe for the incense is in verses 34-38.

Exodus 30:34-38 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Take for yourself spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, spices with pure frankincense; there shall be an equal part of each. "With it you shall make incense, a perfume, the work of a perfumer, salted, pure, *and* holy. "You shall beat some of it very fine, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I will meet with you; it shall be most holy to you. "The incense which you shall make, you shall not make in the same

proportions for yourselves; it shall be holy to you for the LORD.

“Whoever shall make *any* like it, to use as perfume, shall be cut off from his people.”

So, the altar was a part of the daily service of the priest. During the time of Christ there were so many priests they drew lots each day to see who would get to fulfill this duty. Only those who had never performed this service qualified. Each priest was limited to this service once in his life. Exodus 30 also reveals that once a year atonement was made for the altar. Remember, atonement is a word that means “to cleanse” “to purify” and it is always directed toward people or objects. Since this object was a part of the daily service of the priests it would become ritually unclean and need to be atoned for so it could serve in the worship of Shechinah. This happened on the Day of Atonement.

Leviticus 16:18-19 “Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and of the blood of the goat and put it on the horns of the altar on all sides. “With his finger he shall sprinkle some of the blood on it seven times and cleanse it, and from the impurities of the sons of Israel consecrate it.

The Significance of the Altar of Incense. With the altar the key feature is the incense that went up before God. Jewish tradition says this incense was made by one family who never shared their secret. It is claimed that the incense burned straight up toward heaven. The burnt incense typifies the prayers of the saints which go straight up to God in heaven (2 Samuel 24:25; 1 Kings 8:54; Isaiah 56:7; Revelation 8:3). This is pleasing to God. It is the sweet aroma of prayer which pleases God. Since the incense was offered twice a day every day it looks to the fact that each day of our lives should be compassed with prayer. Prayer is not an alternative in the Christian life. It is a necessary part of having a relationship with god. Growing relationships require two-way communication; both must talk and both must listen (alternately). We talk to Him in prayer and we listen to Him in the Scriptures. Both are required but listening to Him comes first so we can know how to talk to Him in prayer. The believer must always listen to God’s word first in order to procure God’s response (John 15:7). This is because we learn to pray in the word of God. Only in the word of God are we told how we are to

pray and what we are to pray for. And though He knows our hearts and minds He declares that we do not have because we do not ask (James 4:2). So, the daily incense offered here signified the daily prayer we need as dependent creatures. God made us to be dependent. We depend on Him for even the most minute things such as the air we breathe and the water we drink. He created it all and He sustains it all. The man who sees this dependency is the one who prays and the one who prays is saying in effect, "He is sufficient for all my needs." The man who does not see this dependency is the one who does not pray and the one who does not pray says in effect, "I am sufficient for all my needs." Such a failure to recognize one's creaturehood is pride to the nth degree. It is, in fact, the same original sin of Satan who thought that he could overcome the boundaries of creaturehood and become the Creator. He did not think he needed God, he thought he could be God. The one who does not pray daily misses out on the resources God offers. It is sad that prayer is so wanting in our churches today. The spiritual poverty of Church in America today is perhaps due to its failure to tap into this God-given resource. I face this fact every week of my life. The ignorance of the word of God and prayer would frighten many of you. It is no wonder the Church in America is in such a decrepit state. We have become so complacent with our material wealth that we cannot see we are spiritually poverty. Christ warned a similar church in Laodicea that such a poor spiritual condition makes Him sick to His stomach and warned He would vomit them out (not loss of salvation but divine discipline). The danger of wealth is always complacency and the danger of complacency is always spiritual poverty. We are only moments from defeat.

Conclusions

We have learned about three articles in the Holy Place and their significance. (1) The key feature with the table of showbread was the bread. Bread is that which nourishes. The bread typified the spiritual nourishment God provides in His word for all equally and continually. The only reason we don't all grow spiritually is because we don't immerse ourselves in the word of God. (2) The key feature with the golden Menorah was the light. Light is that which illumines and penetrates the darkness. God is light and sent His Son, the true Light into the world to enlighten every man. Israel was the light in the OT. The Church is the light in the NT. Our light is derived from Him and we are to let our light shine in this world of darkness. (3) The key feature of the

altar of incense portrays was the incense. Incense portrayed prayer going up before God. The daily offering of prayer signals our dependence upon our Creator. He alone is sufficient for all my needs and He alone is to be glorified and praised for who He is.

ⁱ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:ix). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

ⁱⁱ Each loaf was made with 2 tenths ephah of fine flour (i.e. 4.4 liters).

ⁱⁱⁱ Carson, D. A. (1994). *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: The new Bible commentary. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970. (4th ed.) (Le 24:1). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.

^{iv} Of the Second Temple in the time of Christ Josephus says of its contents, “Lastly, it is not so much as lawful to carry any vessel into the holy house; nor is there anything therein, but the altar [of incense], the table [of showbread], the censer, and the candlestick, which are all written in the law: (107) for there is nothing farther there, nor are there any mysteries performed that may not be spoken of; nor is there any feasting within the place. For what I have now said is publicly known, and supported by the testimony of the whole people, and their operations are very manifest; (108) for although there be four courses of the priests, and everyone of them have above five thousand men in them, yet do they officiate on certain days only; and when those days are over, other priests succeed in the performance of their sacrifices, and assemble together at midday, and receive the keys of the temple, and the vessels by tale, without anything relating to food or drink being carried into the temple; (109) nay, we are not allowed to offer such things at the altar, excepting what is prepared for the sacrifices.

^v MacArthur, J. J. (1997, c1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed.) (Ex 25:30). Nashville: Word Pub.

^{vi} The Talmud describes in great detail the cups, bulbs, etc...

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