

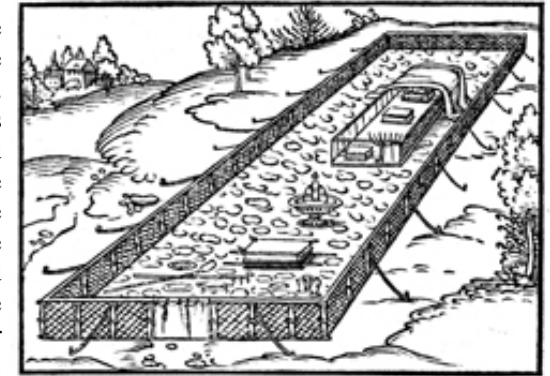
# Exodus study resource

## The Tabernacle (Exodus 25:8)

[TAB ur nack el]-- the tent which served as a place of worship and sign of God's presence with them for the nation of Israel during their early history.

### Introduction

On Mount Sinai, after the Lord had given the c o m m a n d m e n t s , judgments, and ordinances to Moses, He instructed Moses to construct the tabernacle. This tabernacle was to replace the temporary tent that had been pitched outside the camp (Ex. 33:7-11). After describing the offering (Ex. 25:1-9), the Lord proceeded to specify in minute detail the pattern for the tabernacle. He began by giving a description of the holiest item in the entire structure: the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:10-22).



Other items in the tabernacle for which the Lord gave specific construction details included the seven-branched lampstand (Ex. 25:31-39); the intricate curtains of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:1-25); the veils, and the screen (Ex. 26:1-37); the large altar of burnt offering, and the brazen or bronze altar (Ex. 27:1-8); and the hangings for the courtyard (Ex. 27:9-19); and a brief recipe for the oil (Exodus 27:20-21), followed by a description of the priests' garments and consecration (Exodus 28--29). Directions for making the incense altar and the golden altar are given in Exodus 30:1-10. After a brief statement about a tax assessment (Ex. 30:11-16), the Lord told Moses to build a bronze laver or wash basin (Ex. 30:17-21).

Mixed in with these instructions about specific items of the tabernacle are plans for the architecture and design of the building. The tabernacle was in the form of a tent 10 cubits wide and 30 cubits long (a Cubit was the distance from the elbow to the finger tip- about 45 centimeters). It was to be set up with its only entrance toward the east. The tent consisted of a wooden framework made of 46 identical planks 10 cubits long and 1 1/2 cubits wide (a cubit being about 18-20 inches); there were 20 planks each on the north and south sides. Six of the planks were on the west end, along with two additional planks which were 1/2 cubit wide. All of these planks were acacia wood plated with gold.

when the people were encamped. When the people were on the march, with the pillar serving as their guide, the tribes which camped on the east of the tabernacle were first in marching order. These were Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The tabernacle was carried by the assigned family members of Gershon and Merari. The next group in the marching order were the tribes which camped on the south of the tabernacle. These were Reuben, Simeon, and Gad. Following these, the family of Kohath carried the holy objects of the tabernacle. Then came the tribes which camped on the west of the tabernacle. These were Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. The rear guard of the march was composed of the tribes which camped on the north of the tabernacle. These were Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.

When the tribes were camped, two silver trumpets were used to summon the tribes to gather at the tabernacle. The tabernacle was also the place where the 70 elders advised and counseled the people (Num. 11:16). It was also the place of specific judgments (Num. 12:4) and appointments (Deut. 31:14).

### Historical developments

During the conquest of the land of Canaan by the Israelites, the tabernacle remained at Gilgal, while the ark of the covenant was evidently carried from place to place with the armies of Israel. The ark was reported at the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 3:6), at Gilgal (Josh. 4:11), at the conquest of Jericho (Josh. 6:4), at the campaigns against Ai (Josh. 7:6), and at Mount Ebal (Josh. 8:33).

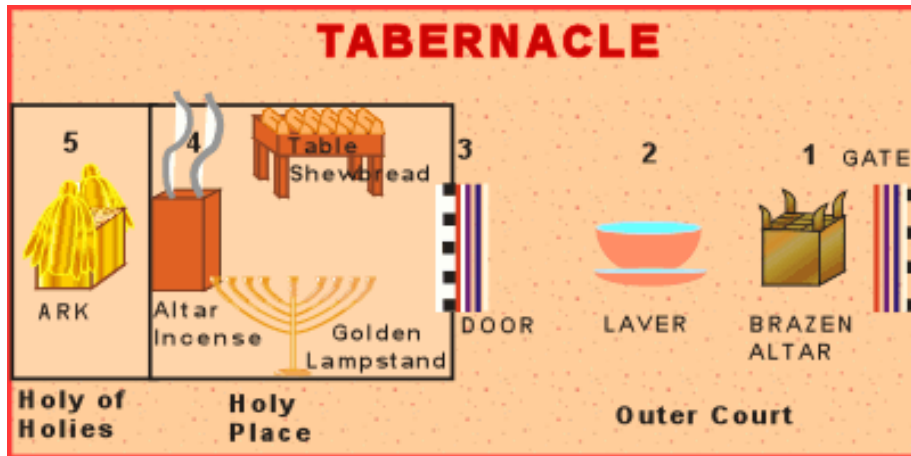
The tabernacle was finally placed on the site which it was to occupy during the duration of the period of conquest and judges, at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1). Here the tribes were assigned their territorial allotments. As the years passed, certain other structures were added to the tabernacle while it remained at Shiloh. These included living quarters for the priests and Levites who served at the tabernacle. By the end of the period of the judges, during the administration of Eli, at least some of the attendants lived on the premises (1 Sam. 3:3).

During the Israelites' battle against the Philistines at Aphek, the ark of the covenant was removed from the tabernacle and taken into battle. Lost to the Philistines, it finally came to rest at Kirjath Jearim (1 Sam. 4:1--7:1). It remained here until the time of David's reign.

With the departure of the ark, the tabernacle lost some of its esteem in the eyes of the Hebrew people (Ps. 78:60). During the reign of Saul, the tabernacle was at Nob (1 Sam. 21:1). From the latter part of David's reign throughout the fourth year of Solomon's reign, the tabernacle was at the high place of Gibeon (1 Chr. 16:39, 21:29). When the Temple was completed, Solomon had the Levites bring the tabernacle to Jerusalem (1 Kin. 8:4; 2 Chr. 5:5), presumably to be stored in the Temple area.

(Adapted from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

Over this framework were four separate coverings that made up the roof of the structure. The first covering was made of fine-twined linen of blue, scarlet, and purple with intricately portrayed “Cherubim” (heavenly creature). The second covering was of pure white goats' hair. The third was of rams' skins dyed red. The topmost covering was of porpoise skins, or possibly leather. The tent constructed in this manner was then divided into two rooms divided by an intricate veil of blue, scarlet, and purple linen embroidered with cherubim.



#### 1, 2, 3. The Outer Court

Surrounding the main building of the tabernacle was a spacious courtyard 100 cubits long in its east-west direction and 50 cubits wide from north to south. This courtyard was surrounded by a fence five cubits high, formed of pillars with silverwork, resting in brass sockets, placed five cubits apart, and hung with fine linen. In the western half of this courtyard the tabernacle itself was to be pitched and in the eastern half stood two items-- the altar of burnt offering or the great bronze altar, and the laver.

#### 4. The Holy Place

The outer, eastern room was called the Holy Place. Ten cubits wide and 20 cubits long, it was entered through the blue, scarlet, and purple linen curtains which served as a door. This door was always aligned toward the east. It contained three items. On the western side of the Holy Place, next to the veil, was the altar of incense, or golden altar, one cubit square and two cubits high. Upon this altar, made of acacia wood overlaid with gold, the morning and evening incense was burned. The incense may have acted as a smoke screen to protect human eyes from seeing beyond the veil and may have covered the smell of the sacrifice too. It no doubt had aesthetic and ceremonial beauty as well. On the northern side of the Holy Place was the seven-branched golden lampstand, or candlestick, comprised of a pedestal, a shaft, and three branches extending to both sides of the shaft. This

lampstand was made of a talent of fine gold. On the southern side of the Holy Place was the table for the “Showbread”, or bread of the presence. This table was made of gold-covered acacia wood two cubits long, one cubit wide, and one and one-half cubits high.

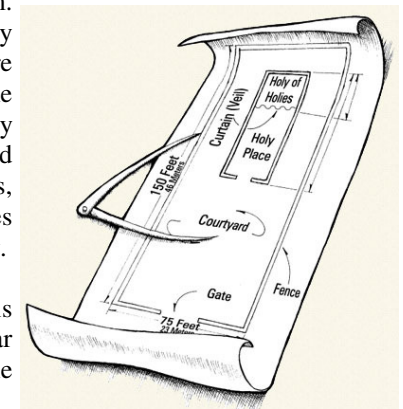
#### 5. The Ark of the Covenant

The inner, western room was called the “Holy of Holies”. It was 10 cubits square, and it contained only one piece of furniture-- the holiest item in the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant. The ark was a chest made of acacia wood covered with gold, 2 1/2 cubits long and 1 1/2 cubits in width and height. In addition, a gold border extended above the top of the ark to keep the lid stationary. The ark also had golden rings on each side so it could be transported with poles that were placed through the rings. The lid of the ark was called the “Mercy Seat”. Upon it were two gold cherubim that faced each other. The ark contained a copy of the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, a copy of the entire law of Moses; a gold pot filled with Manna from the desert wanderings, and Aaron's rod that budded (Numbers 17:8).

#### Building the Structure

The description of the actual building of the tabernacle is recorded in Exodus 35-40. The workers were first enlisted as God had commanded. Following that enlistment, recorded in Exodus 35, the building of each item of the tabernacle is described in Exodus 36-39. The record of the tabernacle's construction occurs in Exodus 40. Up to this time, the nation of Israel had used a temporary tent called the tabernacle of the congregation; this temporary meeting tent is mentioned in Exodus 33:7-11. Just how central the tabernacle was in the life of Israel is graphically portrayed in the Book of Numbers. When the Israelites pitched camp in the wilderness, the tabernacle was to be placed in the center, with the Levites camping next to it (Num. 1:53). Then the tribes were to be arrayed in specific order on the four sides of the tabernacle (Numbers 2).

Responsibilities for the care and moving of the tabernacle were delegated to various families of the tribe of Levi (Num. 1:50-52; Numbers 3-4). The Levitical family of Kohath was to disassemble the structure and cover the tabernacle furnishings with the leather. The tapestries were the responsibility of the family of Gershon. Merari's family had charge of the boards, pillars, foundations, pins, and cords. All these Levitical families were commissioned to care for the sanctuary.



The first day of tabernacle worship is described in Numbers 7-9. The guiding pillar of cloud and fire rested upon the tabernacle