

# Discipleship

## Personal comment:

*The Table and the Lampstand were something of a mystery to me before I studied for this piece today, and I had given them little thought. I have nevertheless come away from this with a number of personal issues buzzing in my head about commitment and the light of God. It is easy to find a large number of Christian 'issues' that can be said to be 'very important', but the challenge of God's Word about what is really important is hard to resist.*

## Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Explore the theme suggested in the questions above, and if you have not used visual aids such as a Cross, or a candle, or an open Bible, for example, then try it out for a little, and see whether you find this to be a helpful way of being reminded of your commitment and God's light in your life.*
- *Pray for the people of Israel who have these signs but who still find it hard to find their fulfilment in Jesus, and therefore still reject Him.*

## Final Prayer

Heavenly Father; come into my life and do those miracles of grace by which I know Your hand is guiding and leading me in the right direction. And if I am not 'right' with You, please bring me to a place of repentance where I can be set free, and therefore find this glorious liberty: AMEN

## Prayer

Stir within me, Holy Lord, the fire which warms my soul; feed it with the breeze of Your Spirit and breathe it into life. Make me glow with all the radiance of the faith within me, so that I may give testimony to Your truth, Your majesty, Your life and Your transforming power; and may I burn with love, the eternal fuel of Your magnificent Creation! Thank You, Holy Lord: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Education

*Pray for children facing exams and tests. Pray about the way children are tested in schools, especially that results will be handled with greater care by schools and society.*

### On-going prayers

- *Lift to the Lord your prayers for this world and the planet's future*
- *Give thanks for the people of this world and pray for their salvation*
- *Pray that politicians will grasp the importance of people's real needs*

Please note that from today, one of the 'on-going' prayer topics will always reflect our concern for the future of the world God has made.

## Meditation

Make time to follow the path of the Lord;  
He has a place to take each one,  
And none can know the destiny except by following.

Make time to seek the Lord and pray;  
He rejoices in this private space,  
For by it each can come to know His gracious will.

Make time to sing praise to the Lord;  
He loves to hear the soul rejoice,  
For it opens up the heart to be receptive to His truth.

Make time to include the Lord at home;  
He loves His place in the family,  
And blesses those who honour Him at home, in love.

Make time to be honest with the Lord;  
He knows each one, He has made all,  
And He completes life's promises, and grants His peace.

## Bible Study - Exodus 25:23-40

<sup>23</sup> *You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. <sup>24</sup> You shall overlay it with pure gold, and make a gold moulding to go all around it. <sup>25</sup> You shall make a rim to go round it a handbreadth wide, and a gold moulding to go all around the rim. <sup>26</sup> You shall cast four rings of gold for it and attach them to the four corners at its four legs. <sup>27</sup> The rings holding the poles used for carrying the table must be fixed adjacent*

to the rim. <sup>28</sup> You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold, and you shall carry the table with them. <sup>29</sup> You shall make out of pure gold its platters, its pans, its flagons and its bowls for pouring. <sup>30</sup> You shall set the Bread of the Presence on the table before me at all times.

<sup>31</sup> You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. You shall make it out of hammered work its base and stem, and its cups including calyxes, and petals; all made from one piece. <sup>32</sup> There shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand from one side of it and three branches from the other side of it;

<sup>33</sup> with three cups shaped like almond blossom on one branch, each with calyx and petals, and three cups shaped like almond blossom on the other branch, each with calyx and petals; and the same for all six branches going out of the lampstand. <sup>34</sup> On the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond blossom, each with its calyxes and petals. <sup>35</sup> There shall be a calyx under the first pair of branches, a calyx under the next pair of branches, and a calyx of under the last pair of branches, all made of one piece; and the same for all six branches that go out of the lampstand. <sup>36</sup> Their calyxes and their branches shall be made from one piece, the whole of it being one hammered piece of pure gold.

<sup>37</sup> You shall make its lamps seven in number; and they will mount its lamps to give light to the space in front of it. <sup>38</sup> Its snuffers and trays shall be of pure gold. <sup>39</sup> A talent of pure gold shall be used to make the lampstand and all these items; <sup>40</sup> and see that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.

## Review

Today, we look at the construction details for the Table and Lampstand God ordered for the Tabernacle (this passage is parallel to the description of their construction by Bezalel in Exodus 37:10-24). We will also look at what the Table and the Lampstand were used for in the Tabernacle; they clearly have great symbolic value to this day, but it is not at all certain what they were originally intended to represent.

The order of the description of these items is interesting, for if we had to give instructions about such a construction today, we would begin with a grand plan and then work towards the detailed items within. However, God set things out the other way round, demonstrating the priorities of the Tabernacle by starting with Himself at the centre. So, we started yesterday with the Ark and the Mercy Seat (25:10-22), and now move on to the Table and Lampstand (25:23-40), before going on tomorrow to the Tabernacle itself and its courtyard (chapters 26 and 27). It is fair to say, therefore, that the Table and the Lampstand have great importance within the Tabernacle.

In order to help us in our studies, I include within the main part of the Bible study some royalty free photographs from the internet of one person's attempt to create a model of the tabernacle and its contents. Below, there are three photographs of a model of the inside of the tabernacle, which give you an idea of the set up of the table and the lampholder described in our passage. The photographs can be seen on their original website at <http://koti.phnet.fi/petripaavola/Tabernacle>. You will see that these items are in a room made up of wood beams, or frames; these are part of the tabernacle construction as described in tomorrow's study (26:15f.), and they form the inner chamber of the large 'tabernacle' tent. It is helpful to gain a quick impression of the construction from such a picture, but if you look at them carefully, they are only an interpretation, and as you read

one (note the four 'cups' required on the central stem in verse 34). Seven lamps, presumably installed on the top of each of the seven stems, provided light. The lamps would have been pottery oil containers with wicks for burning, and the instructions mention the detail of both the snuffers for picking out the wicks from the oil containers, and the tray for placing the wicks and snuffers. In ancient times, the art of keeping a lamp alight was about managing and trimming wicks.

The light itself was intended to be directional, with the lamps set to give light 'in front of it' (25:37). We have not yet come to the instructions for placing the Lampstand, but because it stood to the side of the Tabernacle, this meant its light was directed optimally into the room. It is also likely that it would have been seen from outside the Tabernacle itself, but we will look at the overall design, and what this meant, tomorrow.

## Application

God wanted two items close to Him in the Tabernacle, just outside His 'dwelling' between the cherubim over the Ark; one representing commitment to God, and the other representing His light, poured out on all who worship Him. It is likely that each item had more than one meaning, but these are starting points taken from our most straightforward understanding of the text. It is relatively easy for us to preach upon these things today by taking passages from the New Testament, perhaps the theme of commitment from Jesus' teaching about discipleship (e.g. Matt 8:20f.), or the light of Christ explained by John (e.g. John 1:4,5; 3:19f. or 8:12f.). It is quite another to have a visual demonstration of these things at the heart of worship, as here in the Old Testament, or perhaps even in our homes!

This passage does at least tell us, despite its complexities and its ancient context, that commitment is important to God. He has committed Himself to us and to our salvation. He has made His commitment clear through the life and death of Jesus, and He has done this before anyone ever offered commitment in return. Now He looks for total commitment from us in response to the love of Jesus. How may the 'sign' of the Bread of the Presence help us? I am not sure, except that sometimes each of us need visual representations of what means most to us. I have a Cross on my study desktop that means something to me that is more than I can say, and it represents my commitment to what God has called me to do with my life. There may be something like this that can mean the same to you.

It is also important to know that God is shining His light on us at all times; for the Menorah was to be kept alight all the time, when not packed up for moving under God's command (e.g. Numbers 4:9). It is easy to say this, but we can only answer for ourselves about whether we are conscious of this grace of God all the time. I am not one for lighting candles, but I know that some like to use such a means for reminding themselves of this basic truth. Personally, I find that an open Bible represents the light of God's Word. Again, because this is clearly important to God, should we not all consider various visual aids to represent these things, whatever they may be, to remind us of this unchanging truth?

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What visual means can we use to represent God's light poured out on His people today?
2. What visual means can we use to represent our commitment to God, therefore helping us remember our faith?
3. How easy is it to remember these themes within the many things that happen to us each day without specific reminders? Do we need these visual aids?

### ***The meaning of the 'Bread of the Presence' (25:30)***

There is not much to say about the original meaning of the 'Bread of the Presence'. It was not the same as the 'manna' placed in a jar before God as a remembrance of His provision in the wilderness (this was placed in the Ark – see Ex 16:33). The only clue we have is Leviticus 24:5-9, which is quoted below. The photographs above attempt to show the Bread arranged as described here:

*You shall take choice flour, and bake twelve loaves of it; two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each loaf. You shall place them in two rows, six in a row, on the table of pure gold. You shall put pure frankincense with each row, to be a token offering for the bread, as an offering by fire to the LORD. Every Sabbath day Aaron shall set them in order before the LORD regularly as a commitment of the people of Israel, as a covenant forever. They shall be for Aaron and his descendants, who shall eat them in a holy place, for they are most holy portions for him from the offerings by fire to the LORD, a perpetual due. (Leviticus 24:5-9)*

You will see that the Bread is simply described as a commitment. We will look more closely at what commitment might mean in this passage in our study of Leviticus; however, it is best to take the word at face value here. The offering of the Bread was primarily a sign of the people's commitment to God, but it may well have represented a promise by God to feed His people. Later on in the life of Israel, the people began to falter in their commitment and worshipped 'Ba'al' to try and make their lands fertile (in the days of Elijah – see 1 Kings 17f.). This was because at the time they believed that 'Ba'al' was a god of fertility whilst the Lord God was a god of war. At that time, they lost sight of their core commitment to the Lord God, Creator of all things, and this apostasy in the reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 16:28f.) is regarded as one of the worst episodes of Israel's darker past. The long term commitment of God's people was an important issue, and it remains so to this day.

### ***The details of the Lampstand and their meaning (25:31-40)***

*Model of a  
Menorah*



The complex design of the Lampstand has intrigued people for years, and if you have read the full version of the text (25:23-40) and attempted to understand what each part of this says, you may well have found yourself confused. The basic seven stick lampholder design is obvious enough from the description, but it is not immediately obvious what a 'cup' is (25:31,33). It is only when we look carefully that we can see it represents a flower, perhaps as a symbol of Creation, representing God as the 'Light of the World'. This idea is not found specifically in the Old Testament, but by the time of Christ, Jewish people celebrated a 'festival of lights' that certainly contained this theme.

The positioning of the flower motifs on the Lampstand meant that a total of 22 'almond flower buds were to be found on the stand, combining the holy numbers seven, three and

the text in Exodus, you may feel that some of the details are not quite right! Certainly, their interpretation of the Ark and the Mercy Seat would not be mine (as seen on the site), which is why I did not introduce them yesterday. Pictures are a great help, but they are no substitute for reading the text carefully ourselves.

Yesterday we began to appreciate the amazing visual impact of the Ark and the Mercy Seat God designed, and all that it meant. The visual impact of the Table and the Lampstand that come next was also very powerful. The table was of ornate construction like the ark, and overlaid with gold all around (25:24), but slightly smaller. It was portable and had poles just like the Ark, and the table had plates and cups (see later study for details) as if for eating a meal. However, its purpose was to hold the 'Bread of the Presence' (25:30). Surprisingly, there is no explanation of this offering in Scripture, other than the fact that twelve loaves were baked, and placed on the table each week (Lev 24:5-9). Tradition suggests that it was a perpetual and holy reminder of Israel's dependence upon God, and a holy offering of the people presented constantly before Him, just like the prayers of God's people today (e.g. Eph 5:20, 1 Thess 5:17 etc.).

It is not surprising that the next item described is the famous seven branched 'Menorah', a famous sign of Jewish people to this day; light has always been associated with God since He said 'Let there be light!' (Gen 1:3). The details of the Lampstand are elaborate (see later), but it had a distinct purpose in giving light to this part of the Tabernacle. The outer part of the Tabernacle within which the lamp was set clearly needed light because priests ministered there. However, this part of the tabernacle (unlike the room in which the Ark was kept) was visible from outside. The seven headed lampstand would have been the most powerful light in Israel at the time, and the brightest lamp at night in the desert. As such, it represented God's presence amongst His people in a powerful way.

### ***Going Deeper***

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

- Photographs of models of the Tabernacle
- The details of the Table and their meaning (25:23-29)
- The meaning of the Bread of the Presence (25:30)
- The details of the Lampstand and their meaning (25:31-40)

### ***Notes on the text and translation***

- V23** *'you shall make a table of acacia wood'* It is only a small point, but the ancient 'Septuagint', the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible dating from between the first and third centuries BC, adds 'of pure gold' at this point. It would be in keeping with the text. Nevertheless, it makes us wonder why small changes like this took place in the Hebrew text – we cannot know for sure!
- V29** *'... and it's bowls for pouring'* I have kept here to a close translation of the Hebrew, though most Bible versions add some explanation of what this means by saying something like 'for the pouring out of offerings'. We will look at what this means in the study.
- V30** *'... at all times'* The Hebrew word means 'continuity', meaning something that is always to be done. Some Bibles translate this as 'regularly', which does not quite catch the true sense of continuity.
- V31** *'its cups of floral design including calyces and petals.'* This is one place where without an explanation of the Hebrew words within the translation, few would understand what is being described, The 'cups' are a feature of the design intended

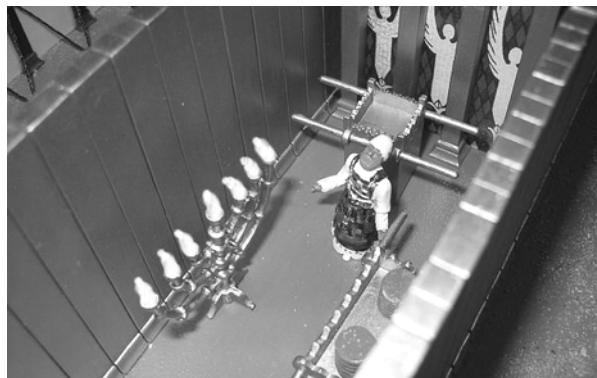
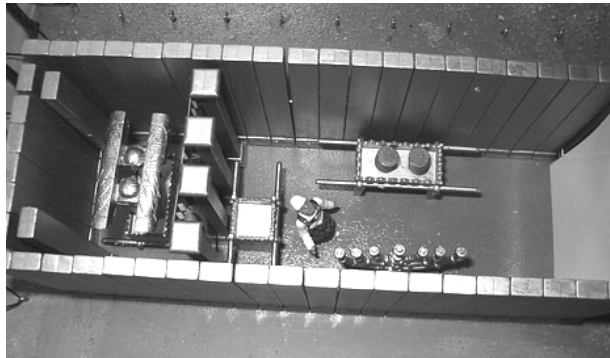
to look like almond blossom – see verse 33, and the calyx is the part of the bud that holds the petals, at the top of a flower stem (see study).

- V35** **'all made from one piece'** This is my translation of what appears in most translations as 'of one piece with it'. The Hebrew phrase is 'from with it', which is a shortened way of saying that the pieces mentioned are made together from one piece.
- V37** **'they will mount its lamps'** In case you are getting confused at this point in the sentence, 'they' means the branches holding the lamps!
- V38** **'the lampstand and all these items'** The Hebrew text does not have the word 'lampstand' here, but the Jewish Masoretic text has 'it', meaning the lampstand. Including the word helps to make sense of what is said here, which is confusing in many translations.

### Going Deeper

#### Photographs of models of the Tabernacle

The framed interior of the Tabernacle with the Ark and Mercy seat to the left inside the 'Holy of Holies'. The priest stands in the Tabernacle tent with the Table to his left and the Lampstand to his right, and with his back to the altar of incense (Exodus 30:1f.)



Close-up of the lampstand – also visible, the altar for incense



The Table of the Bread of the Presence (the bread is round) – also the incense altar

#### The details of the Table and their meaning (25:23-29)

The Table construction was designed to be solid. The size of two cubits by one cubit, and standing one and a half cubits above the floor makes it a modest table, certainly not a grand one. Many people have remarked that the items in this centre for the worship of God were very small, but portable shrines from very ancient times have been dug up in the deserts of the Middle East, and the dimensions seem quite similar to the (non-Israelite) artefacts that have been found.

The instructions God gave concentrate on the table top and the rim, each of which appear to have their separate gold moulding and trim. It is difficult to imagine exactly how this would have been built, though Bezalel appears to have had no difficulty understanding the instructions later on (Ex 37:10f.). We can only presume that the rim served to keep in place the Bread of the Presence (25:30) and the utensils (25:29) when they were wrapped up and placed on the table for transport (Numbers 4:7,8).

It is not certain what the four words describing the utensils for the Table mean. The best we can do is suggest that four different items were made, plates for eating and bowls for holding food, flagons for holding wine or water and cups for drinking (25:29). These items were not normally used for eating, as far as we can see; though it is just possible that priests ate the occasional meal in the Tabernacle (this is not described anywhere in Scripture). It is possible that the construction of these utensils represented an offering to God. He was not thought to 'use' them; in typical Israelite thought, they were merely a representative offering to God. Other peoples of those times made similar things for their 'gods' but believed that they were used, and placed them in the presence of the god accordingly. In the Tabernacle, they were left outside the 'Holy of Holies', close to God, but not 'used' by Him.

Model of a  
Table

