

## Prayer

Open up our hearts O Lord, and save us from becoming consumed by our own concerns and interests instead of Yours or those of others. Direct us towards a genuine concern for all those who need our love, our help, our care, our fellowship and our friendship; and give us a heart to minister Your love to all who need help, care and friendship. In all this, may we find fulfilment, O Lord; AMEN.

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Education

*Pray for Christian teachers, and pray that God will use them to be a good influence in schools throughout the world, and pray for their protection, both spiritually and physically.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray about the serious threat to world peace posed by N. Korea*
- *Lift to the Lord your prayers for this world and the planet's future*
- *Give thanks for the people of this world and their nationalities*

## Meditation

I glory in the love You show me, my Saviour.

You give me courage to stand in the struggles of life

When I'm overwhelmed by problems ahead:

You give me a heart to watch for the needs of others

Despite the temptation to live for myself:

You give me strength to stand and be firm in Faith

To apply what I know, and be faithful to You:

You give me love when all my compassion runs dry

The power to forgive, when hurt by offence:

You give me the power to rise above ordinary things

To do what is greater, and aspire to the best:

You give me hope that is real and a vision for the future

In which all things are complete in Your Kingdom:

I glory in the love You show me, my Saviour.

## Bible Study - Exodus 26,27

<sup>26:1</sup> *Make the Tabernacle with 10 curtains of fine twisted linen, and yarns of blue, purple, and crimson; you shall decorate them with cherubim of high quality of workmanship. <sup>2</sup> Each curtain must be the same size; 28 cubits long and 4 cubits wide. <sup>7</sup> Make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; eleven curtains. <sup>8</sup> All eleven curtains shall be of the same size; 30 cubits long and 4 cubits wide. <sup>14</sup> Make a cover of tanned rams' skins for the tent and an outer covering of fine leather.*

<sup>15</sup> *Make upright supports of acacia wood for the tabernacle; <sup>16</sup> with each support 10 cubits long and one and a half wide, <sup>17</sup> and with 2 clasps in each support to*

*hold the frames together ... with silver bases to go under them ... <sup>26</sup> Make bars of acacia wood, 5 for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, <sup>27</sup> 5 for the other side, and 5 for the west end ... <sup>28</sup> The middle bar, at the mid-point of the supports, extends from end to end.*

*<sup>30</sup> Set up the tabernacle according to its plan, that you were shown on the mountain.*

*<sup>31</sup> Make a curtain out of yarns of blue, purple, and crimson, and of fine twisted linen; decorate them with cherubim of high quality of workmanship. <sup>32</sup> Hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold ... Bring the Ark of the Covenant in there, within the curtain; it will separate the holy place from the most holy. <sup>34</sup> Put the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant in the most holy place, <sup>35</sup> and set the table outside the curtain, and the lampstand on the south side ... and put the table on the north side.*

*<sup>27:1</sup> Make the altar of acacia wood 3 cubits high, 5 cubits long and 5 cubits wide ... <sup>2</sup> Make horns on its four corners ... overlaid with bronze. <sup>3</sup> Make pots to receive its ashes; shovels, basins, forks and fire pans; make all its utensils of bronze. <sup>8</sup> You shall make it hollow, with boards; made just as you were shown on the mountain.*

*<sup>9</sup> Make the Tabernacle courtyard. On the south side it will have hangings of fine twisted linen 100 cubits long; <sup>10</sup> its 20 pillars and their 20 bases shall be of bronze ... <sup>11</sup> Likewise for the north side ... <sup>12</sup> The west side of the courtyard shall be 50 cubits ... <sup>16</sup> For the entrance to the courtyard there shall be a screen 20 cubits long, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework; with 4 pillars and 4 bases.*

*<sup>20</sup> Command the Israelites to bring you pure pressed olive oil for the light, so that the lamp may be kept burning regularly. <sup>21</sup> In the tent of meeting, outside the curtain in front of the Covenant, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the LORD. It will be an everlasting rule to be observed throughout their generations by the Israelites.*

## **Review**

The reading today is a condensed version of Exodus 26 and 27, which describe the design of the Tabernacle and its outer courtyard, together with the some other important features such as the curtain separating off the 'holy of holies' (26:31-35) and the altar for sacrifice (27:1-8). When reading this passage, it is very difficult to find a 'spiritual' message; though we should accept that sometimes, like Moses, we need to be obedient and simply accept what God is telling us. True obedience to God's Word comes when people read it purely because it is God's Word, and not for gain. The experience of many is that by persevering through texts like this, they have been blessed in ways they could never have expected, precisely because they read in obedience and with an open heart. We will nevertheless find that there are some interesting points here of considerable importance.

Here Moses gives us a remarkable set of instructions for God's Tabernacle, His dwelling place with His people on earth. Archaeologists have verified that many features are similar to ancient Arab shrines thousands of years old, and this gives us confidence that it is genuinely ancient. In recent times, some have suggested that the passage was composed by Jews of later times attempting to make an 'idealistic' representation of their past. But the closer we look, the more ancient features we find; for example, the colours used (blue, purple and crimson – see notes below) are characteristic of material dyes used a

holy place,<sup>35</sup> set the table outside the curtain, and the lampstand on the south side opposite the table; and put the table on the north side.

<sup>36</sup> Make a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework. <sup>37</sup> Make 5 acacia pillars for the screen and overlay them with gold; their hooks shall be of gold, and you shall cast five bases of bronze for them.

<sup>27:1</sup> Make the altar of acacia wood 3 cubits high, 5 cubits long and 5 cubits wide; it must be square. <sup>2</sup> Make horns on its four corners, made out of one piece with it, and overlaid with bronze. <sup>3</sup> Make pots to receive its ashes; shovels, basins, forks and fire pans; make all its utensils of bronze. <sup>4</sup> Make a grating for it, a network of bronze; and on this place 4 bronze rings at its 4 corners. <sup>5</sup> Set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net extends halfway down the altar. <sup>6</sup> Make poles for the altar of acacia wood, overlaid with bronze; <sup>7</sup> they shall be put through the rings, so that they are on both sides of the altar when it is carried. <sup>8</sup> You shall make it hollow, with boards; made just as you were shown on the mountain.

<sup>9</sup> Make the Tabernacle courtyard. On the south side it will have hangings of fine twisted linen 100 cubits long; <sup>10</sup> its 20 pillars and their 20 bases shall be of bronze, but have silver pillar hooks and bands. <sup>11</sup> Likewise for the north side there shall be hangings 100 cubits long, their pillars 20 and their bases twenty, of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be of silver.

<sup>12</sup> The west side of the courtyard shall be 50 cubits with hangings, with 10 pillars and ten bases. <sup>13</sup> The eastern front of the courtyard shall be 50 cubits; <sup>14</sup> with 15 cubits of hangings on the one side, with 3 pillars and 3 bases, <sup>15</sup> and 15 cubits of hangings on the other, with 3 pillars and 3 bases.

<sup>16</sup> For the entrance to the courtyard there shall be a screen 20 cubits long, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework; with 4 pillars and 4 bases. <sup>17</sup> All the pillars around the court shall be banded with silver, and have hooks of silver and bases of bronze. <sup>18</sup> The court shall be 100 cubits long, 50 wide, and 5 high, with fine twisted linen hangings and bases of bronze. <sup>19</sup> All the Tabernacle utensils for every use, all its pegs and those of the courtyard, shall be of bronze.

<sup>20</sup> Command the Israelites to bring you pure pressed olive oil for the light, so that the lamp may be kept burning regularly. <sup>21</sup> In the tent of meeting, outside the curtain in front of the Covenant, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the LORD. It will be an everlasting rule to be observed throughout their generations by the Israelites.

thousands of years before Christ. Other dyes were in existence a few centuries later, so our passage fits what would have been 'the best' in Moses' day. Everything about the tent is high quality, and the closer an item is to the Ark at the heart of the Tabernacle, the more ornate it is, and the higher the value of the metal used! Gold and cherubim motifs surrounded the Ark and the Mercy Seat; and further away, the cloth material was plainer, and the metal used was silver, and then bronze for the construction of the outer courtyard! In its very design, the Tabernacle pointed to the excellence of Almighty God!

Most of this passage is purely descriptive, however, and it takes patience to read the whole text (see below) and work out each element. Most of the description is clear, but some details are simply not explained. We can easily work out that the Tabernacle is a large tent with a large multilayered covering (26:1-14) over a wooden frame (25:15-29), and the inside is separated into two rooms by pillars holding a curtain (25:31-35), with the Ark and the Mercy Seat in the inner, 'most Holy Place' (25:34). Outside is a curtained large courtyard (27:9-19) where people worshipped, and gazed into the Tabernacle tent. This was the site of the altar (27:1-8) with an unexpected 'open' construction of wood and metal with 'horns' (see later study), made symbolically from bronze. It was not close enough to the Ark to warrant gold or silver! Lastly, our passage gives instructions for the continual lighting of a 'lamp' in the Tabernacle, though it seems to talk of a single lamp, not the many lamps of the seven branched 'Menorah' It is one of the mysteries of the Tabernacle!

Verse 30 of chapter 26 is pivotal to the whole passage; 'Set up the Tabernacle according to its plan, that you were shown on the mountain.' It seems likely that Moses saw this plan whilst with God on Sinai, and these words represent his attempt to describe in words a heavenly vision! This may explain our difficulty in understanding some of the details. Hebrews reminds us that the Tabernacle is a 'copy and a shadow of what is in heaven' (Heb 8:5), so although it is almost impossible for us to quantify, we can approach this passage in anticipation that God will show us a deeper understanding of His heaven! This encouragement from the New Testament should help us concentrate on these sometimes strange details!

### Going Deeper

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

- Some pictures to help us understand the Tabernacle and courtyard
- Comments on the details of the Tabernacle tent (26:1-29)
- Comments on the details of the Holy of Holies (26:31-35)
- Comments on the details of the altar (27:1-8)
- Comments on the Tabernacle courtyard (27:9-19)

### Notes on the text and translation

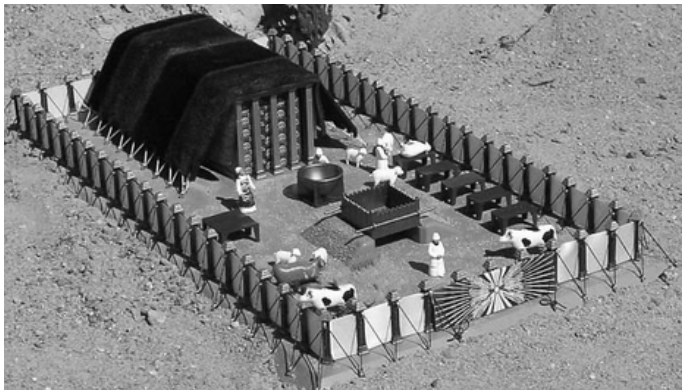
**26v1 'yarns of blue, purple and crimson'** Some translations have 'violet, purple and red'. The limited range of dyes available at that time meant that the only blue available was what is now called indigo, a very deep blue colour. The purple was from murex sea snails and the scarlet was red made from 'cochineal' dye.

**26v1 'you shall decorate them with cherubim of high quality of workmanship.'** The Hebrew says 'with cherubim of esteemed labour you shall make them'. However, the word 'make' is entirely general and depends on the context in which it is used. The working of cherubim into the tabernacle cloth was a form of artistic decoration, so I have translated with this in mind

- 26v3 'join together'** This expression is found in a number of places in this chapter, and the Hebrew suggests what we would expect, which is that the women did this work. This is reflected in the expression which reads literally 'woman to sister'!
- 26v15 'upright supports'** The nature of these supports is not clear. You will read 'frames' in some translations, and 'boards' in others. There is scant evidence for the use of the word in ancient texts, though the term 'boards' is suggested by the use of this term in the building of boats. The complex nature of woodwork structures means we should be cautious however (see study) and I prefer 'support' because this describes the obvious function of these wooden structures.
- 27:4 'make a grating for it'** It is not sure what this means, indeed the positioning of the altar is quite uncertain. The passage suggests that the altar is open in some way (see study), and the grill has some function in the act of burning the meat offered on the altar.

### Going Deeper

Some pictures to help us understand the Tabernacle and courtyard



The Tabernacle in its courtyard with tent coverings visible



### Complete text

<sup>26:1</sup> Make the Tabernacle with 10 curtains of fine twisted linen, and yarns of blue, purple, and crimson; you shall decorate them with cherubim of high quality of workmanship. <sup>2</sup> Each curtain must be the same size; 28 cubits long and 4 cubits wide. <sup>3</sup> Join 5 curtains together; and the same with the other 5. <sup>4</sup> Make loops of blue yarn along the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set; and the same on the second set. <sup>5</sup> Make 50 loops on one curtain, and the same on the other, with the loops opposite one another. <sup>6</sup> Make 50 gold hooks, and join the curtains to each other with the hooks, so that the tabernacle may be one whole.

<sup>7</sup> Make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; eleven curtains. <sup>8</sup> All eleven curtains shall be of the same size; 30 cubits long and 4 cubits wide. <sup>9</sup> Join 5 curtains in one set, and 6 curtains in another, with the sixth curtain folded over at the front of the tent. <sup>10</sup> Make 50 loops along the edge of the outermost curtain in one set, and the same for the second set. <sup>11</sup> Make 50 hooks of bronze, put the hooks into the loops, and join the tent together as one piece. <sup>12</sup> The remaining flap of the tent curtains shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. <sup>13</sup> The extra cubit length on each side of the tent curtains shall hang over both the sides of the tabernacle, to cover it. <sup>14</sup> Make a tanned rams' skins cover for the tent and an outer covering of fine leather.

<sup>15</sup> Make upright supports of acacia wood for the tabernacle; <sup>16</sup> with each support 10 cubits long, and a cubit and a half wide, <sup>17</sup> and 2 clasps in each support to hold the frames together. Make every support for the Tabernacle the same. <sup>18</sup> Make the tabernacle supports: 20 for the south side, <sup>19</sup> and make 40 silver bases to go under them, 2 bases under the first frame for its 2 pegs, and 2 under the next frame. <sup>20</sup> For the other side, the north of the tabernacle, make 20 frames, <sup>21</sup> and their 40 bases of silver, 2 under the first frame, and 2 under the next frame. <sup>22</sup> For the West end of the Tabernacle make 6 frames; <sup>23</sup> make 2 frames for its corners to the rear, <sup>24</sup> held together at the bottom and joined at the top by the first ring; both of them must be the same; forming the 2 corners. <sup>25</sup> So there will be 8 frames, with their 16 bases of silver; 2 under the first frame, and 2 under the next frame.

<sup>26</sup> Make bars of acacia wood, 5 for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, <sup>27</sup> 5 for the frames of the other side, and 5 for the frames of the west end of the Tabernacle. <sup>28</sup> The middle bar, at the mid-point of the supports, extends from end to end. <sup>29</sup> Overlay the frames with gold, and make their rings of gold to hold the bars; and you shall overlay the bars with gold.

<sup>30</sup> Set up the tabernacle according to its plan, that you were shown on the mountain.

<sup>31</sup> Make a curtain out of yarns of blue, purple, and crimson, and of fine twisted linen; decorate them with cherubim of high quality of workmanship. <sup>32</sup> Hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, which have hooks of gold resting on four bases of silver. <sup>33</sup> Hang the curtain from the hooks, and bring the Ark of the Covenant in there, within the curtain; it will separate the holy place from the most holy. <sup>34</sup> Put the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant in the most

have seen the Ark, carried by priests on a pole. We should not think of the Tabernacle as a total mystery to the people; they knew what it was for and used it for worship; they saw it as part of the camp and would have been familiar with its parts, once it was built. This combination of mystery and familiarity remains true to our faith today. For we know Jesus, but do not yet fully 'see' God. The Tabernacle reminds us of this on-going mystery.

Secondly, we are all deeply challenged by the passage in Hebrews that describes the connection between heaven and the Tabernacle. Its interpretation of the Old Testament text can hardly be ignored. We must therefore consider carefully what the Tabernacle represents if we are to understand heaven itself! There may be far more that you can add to these thoughts, but at the least, God is at the centre to be worshipped, He is not entirely fixed but dynamic, but He is approachable yet Holy, and much more! We do not need to recall animal sacrifices, but it is possible for us to imagine that a Cross has replaced the altar; standing 'outside' God's dwelling, with all this means. In addition, the light from His presence gives perpetual light to all things! There are other passages of Scripture that speak about God's heaven (notably Revelation 21), and we should remember that this rather awkward passage has something to contribute to our understanding of His glory!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss the constructions in this passage in your group, and work together to try and gain an general understanding of the whole Tabernacle
2. Which part of the Tabernacle is most meaningful to you, and why?
3. In what ways do you see this construction being a reminder to you of God's heaven?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

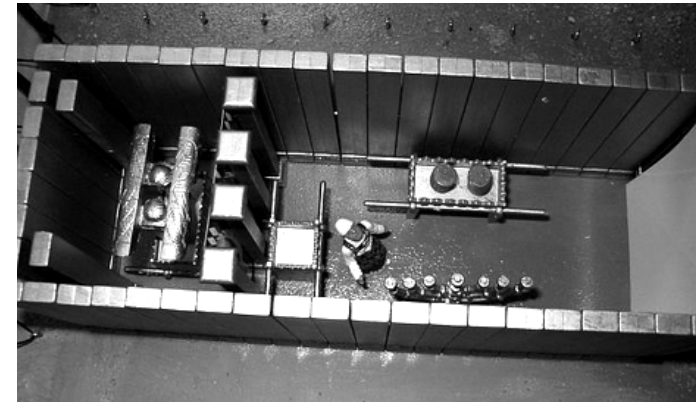
*It is extremely hard to discipline oneself to read the whole of Exodus 26 and 27. The details are somewhat mind-numbing, yet the more you look into it, the more you want to know exactly what it all means! Some parts are easy to understand, some are not, and we have to accept this. I spent some time trying to sort out what proved impossible to decipher, and no one has been able to explain fully every detail here. If you are interested in puzzles, have a go at working on the whole text yourself!*

### Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *What is your mental picture of God in heaven, not just God, but what surrounds Him? Take time to meditate on this and reflect on what all this means, and try to talk to someone else about what comes to mind. Sharing is always a help to remembering!*
- *Pray for the church of God to work together to bring a vision of God's glory to the world, and show Him in a way that people can understand.*

## Final Prayer

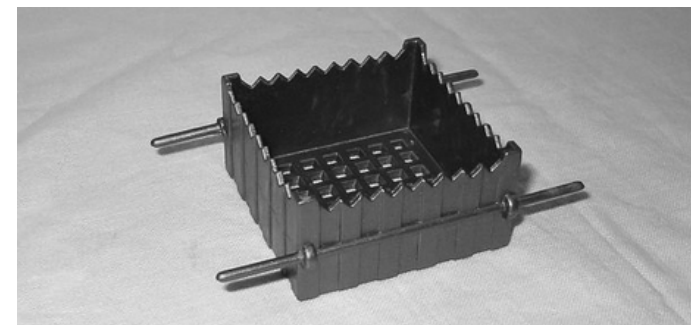
Let me hear Your voice tonight, faithful God and Lord of all. Speak to me so that I may know Your will, whether it be hard or easy, comforting or challenging, exciting or mundane; and let me value each and every word, the instruction You give for Your servant's life. Thank You Lord; AMEN



*Above the separation of the holy place and the most holy place, the Holy of Holies  
Below, the screen separating the Holy of Holies.*



*The altar with 'open' construction and grating*



### **Comments on the details of the Tabernacle tent (26:1-29)**

The description of the Tabernacle begins with a set of curtains made of the finest materials and colourings (see notes above) and embroidered with cherubim motifs, 'of high quality workmanship' (26:1). Two sets of five curtains were made, altogether measuring around forty two by sixty feet. This was the magnificent inside cover for the Tabernacle, seen only from the inside of the tent. Over this was placed a standard tent cover of goats hair, slightly larger in dimensions, presumably to ensure that the inner covering was properly protected. This also had an extra curtain or 'flap' that could be used as an entrance.

In 26:14, two further coverings are described, one of 'tanned ram's skins' and the other of fine leather of unknown origin (seal or dolphin have been suggested, but no one really knows). These are something of a mystery. Some believe (as in the illustrations above) that they were further waterproof coverings to the Tabernacle; others think that because the dimensions are not given, they were wrappings to package the precious tent material and its goat hair cover when journeying. Given that a standard nomadic tent cover was made of goat's hair, I personally reckon that the second suggestion might be correct, though it is hardly worth an argument!

The manufacture of the inner frames has been a subject of debate for years. They clearly supported the curtain, and formed the structure of the two holy rooms,. Some (like the illustrator who created these pictures) believe that they were solid planks. The reason for this (see notes above) is that a similar word is used in Hebrew for the decking on ships! However, the exact dating of such words (and how they are used) is debatable, and it is reasonable to suggest that full planks would have been too heavy to carry; remember that the whole structure was designed to be portable. I prefer the idea that these were open light frames made of poles, and the full text suggests that there were 'clasps' to hold the construction together, as would be required for an open frame construction. If open, the magnificent cherub design of the curtain would drape to form the walls of the inner room, creating a magnificent sight.

The whole structure is described as resting on gold mounts or feet, with a series of poles or 'bars' strung across the top to hold everything in place, though no one has ever been able to fully decipher exactly what is meant by the instructions for 'bars' in 26:26-29! All this demonstrates that the pictures we see above are only an interpretation!

### **Comments on the details of the Holy of Holies(26:31-35)**

The curtain to divide the 'holy place from the most holy' (26:33) is clearly an important part of the Tabernacle, and is carefully described here. Instructions state that the same high quality used for the Tabernacle cover had to be used for this curtain. No dimensions are given, but it is clear that the curtain had to be of one piece, and it formed a total barrier between the two rooms and their contents. The curtain hung on four pillars of gold design, and once hung, it is hard to imagine how anyone would be able go from one room to the other! The only way would seem to be to go around the edge, holding the curtain to one side. No one could make a full frontal entrance to God!

The last few verses of chapter 26 describe the positioning of the Ark and other artefacts in the two rooms; except for the table of incense, described later (30:1f.). The arrangement is straightforward to understand, with the Holy of Holies at the western end of the construction, facing east, and the other items located accordingly.

### **Comments on the details of the altar (27:1-8)**

The altar is not what we might expect. Indeed, it is not certain from the instructions exactly how it was made. The instructions clearly talk about a wooden plated altar, but how could this work as a table four and a half feet high (three cubits – 27:1)? If one piled a fire on this

altar, large enough to burn cattle to a cinder, would it not also burn the wood underneath, despite the metal covering?

The answer to this conundrum lies possibly in the description of the grating (27:4f.), which could either be a grating all the way around the outside, or more possibly, inside a 'hollow' altar (see illustration). With this design, the grating set halfway down the inside of the altar would act like a very large 'barbecue grill'. A fire could be lit under this, and the sacrificed animals placed over the edge of the altar and burned inside it, as indicated in the pictures above. In addition, the altar would not so much hold the blazing fire, but surround it, with the metal surface reflecting the heat back towards the sacrifice; it makes more sense. In this instance, I agree with the interpretation of the people who made this model!

To accompany this design, various shovels and utensils had to be made to deal with the ashes of the fires and remains of sacrificial offerings (27:3).

### **Comments on the Tabernacle courtyard (27:9-19)**

The construction of the courtyard is relatively straightforward, being a curtained area around the Tabernacle, only half the height of the Tabernacle itself at five cubits high. The dimensions of the courtyard were considerable, at 150 feet by 75 feet; perhaps a degree larger than might be expected of one of the larger families of Israel. In those days, people lived outside, and the courtyard was where everything happened, children played and animals were kept. The courtyard screens were high enough to delineate the large area around God's 'home', but low enough for the Tabernacle to be seen from outside relatively easily. God's presence was to be visible! This was where sacrificial offerings were brought to be slaughtered and either offered as whole burnt offerings to God, or shared out with the fat and other parts going to God, other portions to the priests, and the rest to those who brought the offerings.

Clearly, the altar was the main feature of the outer courtyard, though there are no instructions for the positioning of any of the Tabernacle elements in the courtyard. It is reckoned that when the whole assembly was pitched, the Tabernacle was positioned first, with the outer courtyard around it according to the lie of the land, and the altar and other items accordingly, but certainly in front of the Tabernacle tent. The only item not mentioned here is the large bowl or 'laver' used by priests for washing (see 38:8f.). No reason is given for this omission here (or the altar of incense in the Tabernacle tent – see yesterday), and we can only imagine that they might have been something of an afterthought, perhaps recalled later by Moses.

In various places within scripture, the word 'Tabernacle' refers to the Tent, sometimes to the Ark itself, and sometimes to the whole complex including the courtyard around it. Indeed, slightly different names are used in different places; the 'dwelling place of the Testimony' (38:21), and the 'Tent of Meeting' (39:32) or the 'Holy Place' (38:24). The variation of these terms speaks to us of something that was a major part of Israelite tradition for many years, therefore creating these different terms and references. This, again, suggests that these records are very ancient.

## **Application**

Two things come to mind as we study this design; firstly, how it focuses the life of Israel on the presence of God in their midst. God was with His people in many ways, but He chose to be present with them in this special way to give them a visible reminder that they could not ignore! The portable structure was moved a great deal during the forty year's wandering in the wilderness, so although the beauty of the inner features was not visible when the Tabernacle was set up, when they moved and took the whole assembly down, people would have seen the great designs of the cherubim, for example. They would also