

# Exodus 37: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Exodus chapter 38 tells us about the construction of the ark, the table, the lampstand and the altar of incense.

These are all of the golden items of furniture in the tabernacle. Earlier on we identified two seven days sequences. The first one in Exodus chapter 25 to 29 and then another in Exodus chapter 30 to 31.

The first sequence begins with the ark, the table and the lampstand and the second sequence begins with the altar of incense. And here we have all of the golden items listed together in their earlier order.

[ 4 : 01 ] The list of items in Exodus chapter 35 to 40 is not an exact and identical repetition of the instructions of the earlier chapters. There are variations in the order and other details.

For instance, the altar of incense is both distinct from the altar of incense is both distinct from, but associated with the other first day golden furniture of the tabernacle.

Furthermore, its placement here is both of the altar of the altar of the altar of the altar. The altar of burnt offering in chapter 38 verses 1 to 7, which is strikingly similar in detail.

So we're being invited to see a connection between these two pieces of furniture. Perhaps the ordering in chapters 35 to 40 is more spatial. So you have a movement from the tabernacle structure itself in chapter 36 to the items within it in chapter 37 to the courtyard and its furniture in chapter 38 to the priestly garments in chapter 39.

The Ark of the Covenant comes first. The Ark of the Covenant has two parts to it, the Ark and the Mercy Seat, and these function as the footstool and the throne.

[ 5 : 12 ] The Lord was understood to be enthroned above the cherubim. You find this in 1 Samuel 4 verse 4, 2 Samuel 6 verse 2, 2 Kings chapter 19 verse 15, 1 Chronicles 13 verse 6, Psalm 80 verse 1, Psalm 99 verse 1, and Isaiah 37 verse 16.

All of these verses suggest that God was seen as the one who was enthroned above the cherubim. This was not just an incidental detail of God's presence.

It was seen almost as a title for the Lord. So the mercy seat was God's throne and the Ark was God's footstool. In Egypt, thrones and footstools could be placed in tombs along with mummified pharaohs.

They were seen as part of the furniture of royalty. And within the tabernacle, the Ark and the mercy seat are the tabernacle's furniture of royalty for the Lord.

They're the throne and the footstool. The cherubim of the tabernacle seem to have had two wings and one face each, whereas the cherubim of Ezekiel's throne vision in Ezekiel chapter 1 have four faces and four wings.

[ 6 : 21 ] In that case, they're hybrid creatures. They're associated with the mobile throne of the Lord. And the tabernacle as God's portable palace symbolises God's imminent presence in the midst of his people, but also symbolises the highest heavens in which God is enthroned above all powers, yet surrounded by angelic hosts, cherubim, seraphim, etc. as the participants in the divine council.

The presence of the cherubim here maybe alerts us to the fact that God is seen to be surrounded by heavenly creatures, creatures that participate in heavenly rule with him. Certain parts of the Old Testament might suggest that there are a number of different gods, with a small g, who are powers alongside God.

None of them are to be worshipped. And all of them are creatures relative to God, who is the sole creator. But there are powers. There are angelic forces. There are forces that are over nations and other things like that.

And so God is surrounded by such creatures as the cherubim and others, who are his servants, his ministers. And then there are also false gods associated with demonic forces and fallen angels. The tabernacle was a portable palace, and the furniture generally had rings attached and poles by which they could be carried from place to place. However, the description of the ark suggests that it was the only piece of furniture that always had the poles within it.

[ 7 : 48 ] This is presumably to minimise the risk of its being handled inappropriately. After the ark, we reach the table. And we should note that some of the golden vessels that come with the table go beyond just the presentation of bread.

There are plates, but there are also dishes for incense. There are bowls and flagons for drink offerings. The table contained both bread and wine, suggesting that the holy place might be seen as a sort of room for the honoured guests of the Lord to be entertained.

The priests would eat the bread after a week, as we see in Leviticus chapter 24, verses 5 to 9, and the bread would be served along with frankincense, as a pleasing offering to the Lord.

In chapter 24 of Exodus, Moses, the elders of Israel, Aaron and his sons, ate a meal before God's throne. And I believe that the table in part represents this.

It's the access that Israel has to God's presence. It's the table of the Lord Most High and a sign of his favour towards Israel, whom he brings into his royal banqueting house.

[ 8 : 53 ] The description of the lampstand is a bit confusing. It seems to be made entirely of gold, though, without any underlying wooden structure. The lampstand is described in ways that might suggest botanic associations.

So it has branches, blossoms, flowers, etc. It could maybe be seen as a burning tree, like the burning bush of Exodus chapter 3. It gives light to a room that would otherwise be in darkness.

So it serves a very practical purpose in that regard. Some have suggested astronomical associations, perhaps with the seven major heavenly bodies, the Sun, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn.

We have prophetic symbolism associated with lampstands in Zechariah chapter 4 and in Revelation chapter 1. The seven stars represent the seven angels of the churches.

The lamps upon the lampstand elsewhere are seen as bearers of a divine or an angelic light. The stand that bears this light may be associated with the people. So the people are the lampstand and they bear the light of the Lord Most High.

[ 9 : 58 ] Perhaps we might also think of the day of Pentecost. On that day, the church is anointed with the oil of the Spirit and lit, flames above each head like lamps on a lampstand.

The altar of incense comes next and that's connected with the bronze altar that follows it in chapter 38 verses 1 to 7. The altar of incense has horns like that altar.

It has dimensions that are scaled down from the larger altar but are corresponding to it in other ways. The altar of incense was situated inside the holy place before the veil and incense seems to be connected with prayer.

It's a sweet-smelling aroma continually ascending to the Lord. Now when we read the descriptions of the tabernacle, the danger can be that we focus far too narrowly upon static objects or inert pieces of furniture.

But furniture in a home, for instance, is an invitation to corresponding forms of life. Chairs we can think of as an invitation to sit down and to enjoy conversation and fellowship with other people.

[ 11 : 01 ] A bed is an invitation to sleep and maybe also for sexual relations. A table is an invitation to a shared meal. The furniture of the tabernacle should be seen in the same sort of way.

The Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat correspond to God's enthroned presence in the midst of his people. The table of the presence corresponds to Israel's honoured place at the Lord's table, to the communion that God extends to his people.

The lampstand corresponds to the glorious light and the illumination that God gives in the darkness of the world. The altar of incense corresponds to the prayers of the people that ascend to his presence.

The bronze altar corresponds to the offering of ourselves and our works to the Lord through symbolic substitutes so that we can enter into his presence. The bronze sea corresponds to God's

