

“GOD WITH US”:

The Exodus Through the lens of trauma

By Richard Lawrence

In the Spring of 2022, I had the privilege of taking a class on Torah/Pentateuch taught by Dr. Sara Koenig at Seattle Pacific University. Each student was required to select a passage or topic from the Torah as the subject of an undergraduate level research project. This paper is in response to the professor encouraging me to publish what I wrote, for the larger Christian audience.

Abstract

The Exodus narrative tells the story of the nation of Israel being delivered by God from a 400 year long Egyptian slavery and a subsequent 40 years of wandering as they moved toward the land that God promised them.

This God establishes a unique “covenant” relationship with the nation in which He promises to care and provide for them if they will only “Obey My voice and keep My covenant” (Exodus 19:3-8). The agreement was straight forward and yet as we read the Exodus narrative “obey” was the one thing that they seemed unable or unwilling to do (Psalm 81:11). The entire first generation, except for Caleb, Joshua and their families died ignobly in the wilderness.

This paper attempts to answer the “why” question of Israel’s failure by viewing it through the lens of trauma. It asserts that they experienced numerous life-threatening traumas which impacted their responsiveness to God and that the three elements of

God's presence, God's Law and God's Tabernacle may have been intended to function as means of addressing their traumas with healing and recovery.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

“GOD WITH US”: The Exodus Through the lens of trauma	1
“GOD WITH US” IN THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE.....	6
IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN	6
IN THE TABERNACLE	7
IN THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS	7
IN ETERNITY	7
A SYNOPSIS OF THE EXODUS STORY	7
PART ONE: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TABERNACLE	11
A HISTORY OF JEWISH AND ANCIENT CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION.....	12
PENTATEUCHAL TRADITIONS.....	13
JEWISH TRADITIONS	14
JEWISH LITERATURE 200 B.C. – A.D. 150.....	14
ANCIENT CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION	15
FOCAL POINT OF ISRAEL’S ENCAMPMENTS	16
PART TWO: SPIRITUAL, CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCES.....	18
SPIRITUAL: IMPACT OF POLYTHEISM	18
THE GOD OF ISRAEL IS GREATER THAN ALL OTHER EGYPTIAN GODS AND GODDESSES.	21
#1: <i>HAPI</i> - EGYPTIAN GOD OF THE NILE	21
EGYPTIAN PLAGUE - WATER TURNED TO BLOOD	21
#2: <i>HEKET</i> - EGYPTIAN GODDESS OF FERTILITY, WATER, RENEWAL	22
EGYPTIAN PLAGUE - FROGS COMING FROM THE NILE RIVER.....	22
#3: <i>GEB</i> - EGYPTIAN GOD OF THE EARTH.....	22
EGYPTIAN PLAGUE - LICE FROM THE DUST OF THE EARTH	22
#4: <i>KHEPRI</i> - EGYPTIAN GOD OF CREATION, MOVEMENT OF THE SUN, REBIRTH.....	23
EGYPTIAN PLAGUE - SWARMS OF FLIES.....	23
#5: <i>HATHOR</i> - EGYPTIAN GODDESS OF LOVE AND PROTECTION	24
EGYPTIAN PLAGUE- DEATH OF CATTLE AND LIVESTOCK.....	24
#6: <i>ISIS</i> - EGYPTIAN GODDESS OF MEDICINE AND PEACE	24
EGYPTIAN PLAGUE - ASHES TURNED TO BOILS AND SORES	24
#7: <i>NUT</i> - EGYPTIAN GODDESS OF THE SKY.....	25
EGYPTIAN PLAGUE- HAIL RAINED DOWN IN THE FORM OF FIRE	25
#8: <i>SETH</i> - EGYPTIAN GOD OF STORMS AND DISORDER	26

EGYPTIAN PLAGUE - LOCUSTS SENT FROM THE SKY	26
#9: RA - THE SUN GOD	26
EGYPTIAN PLAGUE - THREE DAYS OF COMPLETE DARKNESS	26
#10: PHARAOH - THE ULTIMATE POWER OF EGYPT	27
EGYPTIAN PLAGUE- DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN	27
IMPACT OF SLAVERY.....	28
PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS	31
TRAUMA HERMENEUTICS.....	36
TRAUMA SHATTERS OUR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT LIFE	37
NEUROSCIENCE	38
TRAUMA IS INTERGENERATIONAL.....	39
TRAUMA INFORMED CARE	40
COLLECTIVE TRAUMA	44
PART THREE: “GOD WITH US” AND THE TABERNACLE AS GOD’S INSTRUMENTS OF HEALING AND RECOVERY	46
GOD’S PRESENCE	48
GOD’S LAW.....	49
GOD’S TABERNACLE.....	50
WORDS MATTER.....	54
ARK OF THE COVENANT & MERCY SEAT.....	58
TABLE OF SHOWBREAD OR BREAD OF THE PRESENCE	61
GOLDEN LAMPSTAND.....	63
SPECIFICATIONS: EXODUS 25:31-39.....	63
COMPLETION: EXODUS 37:17-34.....	63
DIMENSIONS: NO SPECIFIC DIMENSIONS.	63
.....	66
CURTAINS OF LINEN	66
CURTAINS OF GOAT’S HAIR, RAMS SKIN AND BADGER SKINS	67
.....	69
BOARDS & BASES FOR THE TABERNACLE	69
VEIL & SCREEN	71
SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE AND OBSERVATIONS:.....	71
THE BRONZE ALTAR	73
COURT OF THE TABERNACLE	75

PRIESTLY GARMENTS..... 77

URUM AND THUMMIN 81

ALTAR OF INCENSE..... 83

LAVAR OF BRONZE 85

CONCLUSIONS 88

ISRAEL’S EXPERIENCE..... 88

“GOD WITH US” IN THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

Before our consideration of the Exodus narrative and its’ focus on the presence of God there is value in taking a high-altitude look at one of the overarching themes of the Bible. As a life-long student of the Bible I would argue that one of the major themes that runs throughout the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and Christian Scriptures (New Testament) is that of God dwelling with humanity. I see four instances of this recurring theme:

In the Garden of Eden

God creates the man and woman and places them in His own garden to cultivate and tend it. Reading the account in Genesis it seems as if walking and talking with God was a normal event for these two. And even after they partook of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil this relationship must have continued as we read,

Now they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰ He said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” (Genesis 3:8-10).

This passage suggests that they were accustomed to being in the presence of the creator God as He and they walked through the garden. They did however experience shame as a result of their disobedience. They are sent out of the garden and God sends an angel to keep them from also partaking from the tree of life.

In the Tabernacle

In Exodus 25:8 God tells Moses to “... construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them.” Moses was shown detailed plans for its construction while on Mount Sinai in the presence of God (Exo. 25:9, 40 and 26:30) and told to follow the plan precisely.

In the Person and Work of Jesus

The Apostle John informs us that “the *Word (Jesus) became flesh, and dwelt (Gr: tabernacled) among us,*” (John 1:14). All of Jesus’ life, teaching and sacrifice were a grand fulfillment of “God with us.”

In Eternity

The Christian Scriptures close with the book of Revelation where God fully restores His Kingdom on this earth and declares “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and *He shall dwell among them,* and they shall be His people, and *God Himself shall be among them.*” (Revelation 21:3).

A Synopsis of the Exodus Story

The Exodus narrative and the structure of the tabernacle actually begin back in Genesis where we read,

Now the LORD said to Abram,
Go from your country,
And from your relatives
And from your father’s house,
To the land which I will show you;
And I will make you into a great nation,
And I will bless you,
And make your name great;

And *you shall* be a blessing;
And I will bless those who bless you,
And the one who curses you I will curse.
And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed. (Genesis 12:1-3)

Only a few chapters later, during the actual confirmation ceremony of the agreement (covenant) between Abram and Yahweh He again speaks to Abram

Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the wrongdoing of the Amorite is not yet complete. (Genesis 15:13-16)

This same promise and prophecy were given to Abram's son Issac (Genesis 26:1-4) and to Issac's son Jacob (Genesis 28:13-14). It would have been common knowledge to their entire family as the stories were shared over the generations. Toward the end of Genesis, we are introduced to Jacob's son Joseph who was hated by his eleven brothers and sold to an Egyptian family. Through a series of circumstances this son ends up in an Egyptian prison and eventually ascends to the second in command in Egypt itself. It is this Joseph who is used by God to save up grain in Egypt during seven years of plenty then sells it back to sustain lives during seven years of famine.

As we open up to the first chapter of Exodus, we discover that Joseph's family has increased exponentially and over several generations the Egyptian pharaoh came to fear that in a time of war these "sons of Israel" might join Egypt's enemies. The birth of the man Moses brings one of these very Israelites into the royal family where he is both accepted and educated. The adult Moses becomes concerned about the treatment of the Israelite's and seeks to defend them. Eventually he is compelled to leave Egypt and

spends the next 40 years as a shepherd in the land of Midian. Then at the age of 80 Moses returns to Egypt with a commission from Yahweh to bring Israel out of Egypt and to the land he promised them. Through Moses, and his brother Aaron, God brings a series of ten plagues upon Egypt trying to convince the pharaoh to release Israel from their bondage. He repeatedly refuses and Yahweh eventually judges the nation of Egypt and frees them.

The nation flees into the wilderness with the Egyptian army behind them. God's positions a pillar of cloud/pillar of fire between Egypt and Israel to protect Israel while creating confusion among the Egyptians. God parts the Reed (Red) Sea so the nation can pass over and drowns the Egyptian army in that very sea. Thus begins a 40-year journey in which God "dwells" the nation of Israel and seeks to get them to simply trust Him. This experiment ends 40 years later with Israel's abject failure and the eventual death of the first generation in the wilderness.

It is easy to look back at the first generation of Israel and criticize them for their failure to trust the God who so clearly made Himself known to them and even Yahweh declared that Israel was "an obstinate people" (Exodus 32:9, 33:3, 33:5). But as I read the narrative carefully and thought about the political, social and spiritual environment they lived in it may be possible to piece together the "WHY" of their failure. That is the goal of this paper; to explore the possible influences that made them who they were and may help explain why they failed to trust Yahweh and eventually died in the wilderness without entering the land that God promised. The intent is not to absolve them of guilt for their decisions and responses but to just better understand. It will seek to show that God's presence, God's law and God's tabernacle may have been intended by God to be a means of healing and recovery from the traumas they experienced in Egypt and along

the journey. The study will be broken down under three headings: 1) The Importance of the Tabernacle; 2) Spiritual, Cultural and Psychological Influences on Israel; and 3) “God with us” and the Tabernacle as Instruments of Healing and Recovery.

This study will not deal with how the tabernacle pointed forward to the person and work of Jesus Christ, but what it might have meant to the people of Israel as they looked on this structure sitting in the middle of their camp. All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Bible¹, unless otherwise noted.

¹ New American Standard Bible Side-Column Reference Edition, The Lockman Foundation, Foundation Publishing, 2020.

PART ONE: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TABERNACLE



Model of the tabernacle, as seen in Israel, Timna Park²

Twelve full chapters in the Torah are dedicated to describing the design and installation of the “holy tent” as it is referred to above (Exo. 25-30 and 35-40). This structure called the tabernacle traveled with the nation of Israel throughout their 40 years of wandering. Andrew Hill and John Walton help to put the tabernacle into the larger picture of God’s plan for the nation of Israel. They explain that.

Although Moses is the primary human character of the Exodus narratives, the real story is the redemptive work of Yahweh in delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt and establishing a unique covenant relationship with the

² Model of the tabernacle, as seen in Israel, Timna Park, [File:Stiftshuette Modell Timnapark.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#)

nation. These acts of God signaled his good intentions to keep the promises made generations ago to Abraham and the other patriarchs (cf. 3:7-16). Israel's exodus from Egypt is the redemption event of the Old Testament. Along with the Covenant ceremony at Sinai it constitutes the high-water mark of Old Testament salvation history.³

They also point out that “The tabernacle structure was designed to symbolize the active presence of the Lord among the Hebrews.”⁴

A History of Jewish and Ancient Christian Interpretation

The Hebrew word for tabernacle is מִשְׁכָּן mishkân, mish-kawn'; from Strong's # H7931 and is defined as a residence (including a shepherd's hut, the lair of animals, figuratively, the grave; also the Temple); specifically, the Tabernacle (properly, its wooden walls):—dwelleth, dwelling (place), habitation, tabernacle, tent.⁵

In observing what the Talmud (the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend comprising the Mishnah and the Gemara) says regarding the word “tabernacle”, passages explored seemed to focus not on the overall understanding of the structure and its meaning but on details regarding consecration of the various sacrifices and discussions about what to do with animals that seem to have aged out and are no longer suitable for sacrifice.⁶ Another comment found in the Talmud on the construction of the tabernacle speaks at length about the length of the curtains covering the tabernacle and

³ Andrew E., Hill, and John H. Walton. 1991. *A survey of the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House). 103

⁴ Hill and Walton. *A survey of the Old Testament*. 120.

⁵ "H4908 - miškān - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (nasb95)." Blue Letter Bible. Web. 5 May, 2022. <<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h4908/nasb95/wlc/0-1/>>.

⁶ Isadore Epstein. Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, [v. 20] Shebuoth, Makkoth, (London: Soncino 1965.). 11a, 11b, 12a.

that the additional material covered the sockets into which the vertical boards were inserted. The writer then asks “What did the Tabernacle resemble? A woman who goes in the street and her skirts trail after her”⁷ Several other Talmudic references were consulted but all seemed to deal with more vague details rather than what might be considered relevant to the question of how a typical Israelite might have understood the presence of the tabernacle in the midst of the camp.

Many comments regarding the tabernacle in the Midrash (ancient commentary on part of the Hebrew scriptures, attached to the biblical text) address specific elements in the tabernacle and insights relating to sacrifices rather than speaking of the significance of the tabernacle overall. One helpful comment was a reference to the “pattern” (Exo. 25:40) that Moses was shown on the mountain. The rabbi comments on the phrase “Exactly as I show you” saying:

The Holy One literally showed Moses images of all the utensils and all the construction, just like the “visions of God (Ezek. 40:2) in which Ezekiel, in Babylonia, was shown the Second Temple. It was explained to him by means of words as well: ‘Mortal, look closely and listen attentively and not well everything I am going to show you’ (Ezek. 40:4). V. 40 her, ‘the patterns ... that are being shown you on the mountain,’ proves that Moses was shown images as well as words; if he was ‘shown’ only in speech there would have been no need to say that they were shown to him ‘on the mountain.’⁸

Pentateuchal Traditions

Craig R. Koester notes that there are several early traditions regarding the tabernacle including one which considered the “Tent of Meeting” (Exo. 33:7-11) as a

⁷ Isadore Epstein. Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, [v. 3] Shabbath, (London: Soncino 1965.). 98b.

⁸ H. Freedman and Maurice Simon. *Midrash Rabbah. 3rd ed. v. 3. Exodus* / translated by S.M. Lehrman, London; New York: Soncino, 1983. 218.

precursor of the tabernacle. This tent was outside the camp, instead of in the center, and Yahweh met and talked with Moses from within the cloud rather than at the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant. Moses and the people left the camp to meet with God who descended in the cloud.⁹

Jewish Traditions

The Anchor Bible Dictionary says that the tabernacle “Is presented in biblical narrative as the visible sign of Yahweh’s presence among the people of Israel. More verses of the Pentateuch are devoted to it than any other object.”¹⁰ And a quote from the Mishnah helps explain the centrality of the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant, in particular, in Jewish thinking:

As a general rule, Judaism rejects physical manifestations of spirituality, preferring instead to focus on actions and beliefs ... Worship of graven images is harshly condemned throughout the Torah, and perhaps the greatest sin the Israelites collectively committed was the construction of the Golden Calf (in Ex. 32), intended to serve as a physical intermediary between them and God. Today, Jews do not venerate any holy relics or man-made symbols. But in the history of the Jewish people, there was one exception to this rule. One man-made object was considered intrinsically holy - the Ark of the Covenant.¹¹

Jewish Literature 200 B.C. – A.D. 150

In *The Dwelling of God*, Craig R. Koster provides an excellent overview of how the Jews in this time period understood the role and meaning of the tabernacle. He writes

⁹ Craig R. Koester, . *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament*. (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989. Print. Catholic Biblical Quarterly. Monograph Ser.), 22.

¹⁰ David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. First ed. New York: Doubleday, v. 6. Si-Z, 1992. Print. 292 – VI.

¹¹ *Ancient Jewish History: The Ark of the Covenant*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-ark-of-the-covenant>. Web

that “During the period between the latest OT texts and the NT, the tabernacle continued to appear in Jewish writings ... A survey of this literature in its own right helps to establish a context for the interpretation of the NT by sketching out the diverse ways in which the tabernacle was perceived during this period.”¹² A full examination of these 52 pages in Koster’s book lies outside the scope of this project, but could be of value to anyone who wants to explore a good overview of the Jewish understanding of the tabernacle during these intervening years. Koester covers Jewish literature from pre-Maccabean sources, The Dead Sea Scrolls, and the wider history of Israel in non-Biblical sources and rabbinic traditions.

Ancient Christian Interpretation

The IVP Christian Commentary on Scripture takes the reader from the world of Jewish interpretations to that of the early Church Fathers and leaders over the centuries who, after the appearance of Jesus view the tabernacle as a full-blown symbol of the person and work of Jesus Christ. A couple of examples of this level of symbolic interpretation should suffice¹³

25:9 The Pattern of the Tabernacle

ONLY A PATTERN OR MODEL. EPHREM THE SYRIAN: By saying [to him], “You shall make everything according to the model of the tabernacle that I will show you,” he first called it a model and a temporal tabernacle to indicate that it was transitory and that it would be replaced by the church, the perfect prototype which lasts forever. And so ... they would esteem it because of its likeness to the heavenly tabernacle. COMMENTARY ON EXODUS 25:1. ⁸¹⁹³

¹² Craig R. Koester. *The Dwelling of God*. 23-75.

¹³ Joseph Lienhard, Ronnie Rombs, and Thomas C. Oden. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Old Testament; 3. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001.184, 185.

25:12 Four Rings of Gold

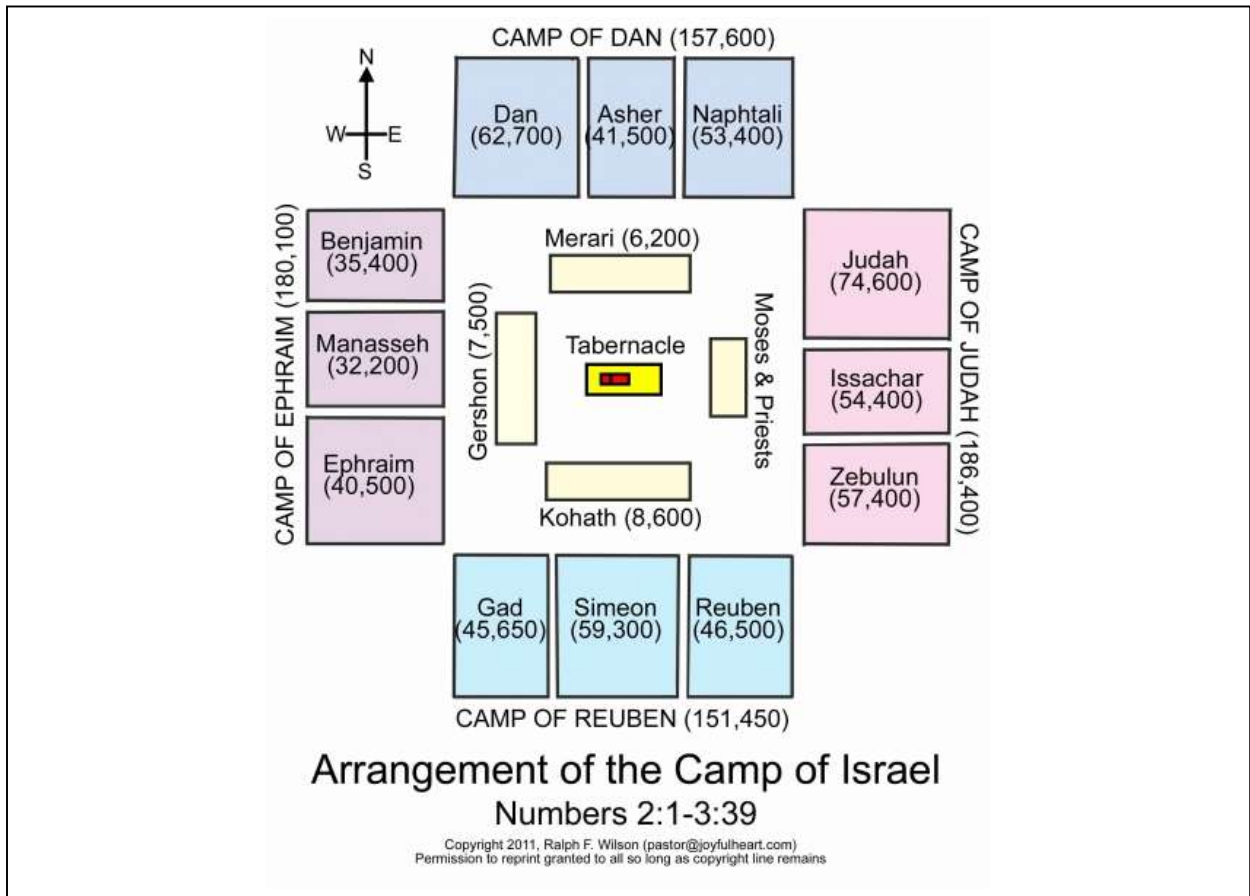
THE RINGS AND THE STAVES. GREGORY THE GREAT: What is symbolized by the ark but holy church? The orders are that it is to be provided with four rings of gold in the four corners—obviously because, being extended to the four parts of the world, it is declared to be equipped with the four books of the holy Gospels. And staves of setim wood are made and inserted into these rings for carrying, because strong and persevering teachers, like incorruptible timbers, are to be sought out, who, always adhering to the instructions of the sacred volumes, proclaim the unity of holy church, and, as it were, carry the ark, by their being let into the rings. Indeed, to carry the ark with staves is to bring holy church through preaching to the untutored minds of unbelievers. Furthermore, they are ordered to be overlaid with gold, that when the sound of their preaching goes forth to others, they may themselves shine in the splendor of their way of life. PASTORAL CARE 2.11.⁸²¹²

In reviewing these various resources this writer found the Talmudic tradition of less value than other sources. The rabbis in Talmud often seem to comment on rather esoteric thoughts about the “tabernacle” that this author did not find particularly helpful. I found greater value in the Misrash especially in its focus on the “pattern” given to Moses. This value was also observed in looking at Midrash comments on specific articles of furnishings in the tabernacle as well. The shift from the writings of the rabbis to the writings of the early church fathers is quite surprising. Suddenly it seems that the only value of the tabernacle was as a foreshadowing of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Of course, this is appropriate and certainly reflects what the apostles taught but still seems to lack a sense of appreciation for the unique character and meaning of the tabernacle in its own right and how it may have been received by the people of Israel as they traversed the wilderness.

Focal Point of Israel’s Encampments

The tabernacle became the focal point of Israel’s community and life, with the 12

tribes encamped along its four sides. Its placement in the center of the encampment instead of being placed on a hilltop raised above the community made it the center of Israel’s daily life (Exo. 2:1; 3:39). This structure along with the presence of the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud would be visible to all and sent a clear message that in spite of His holiness Yahweh was available and accessible to all. The illustration below will help to visualize this.



PART TWO: SPIRITUAL, CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

All of us find that our lives are cluttered with many experiences in life that contribute to who we are and how we respond to the world around us. In like manner the exodus story is layered with many external influences that need to be understood to gain a clearer picture of the first generation of Israel and the possible reasons for their failure to live up to their commitment to Yahweh (Exo. 24:3). In this section I would like to touch on three such possible influences: Egyptian polytheism (Spiritual), political slavery and psychological stress (trauma).

Spiritual: Impact of Polytheism

In the ancient world there was no separation between the spiritual world and the natural world. Gods and goddesses were the ones who created all that exists, and they maintained order in the created world.¹⁴ Everything we today would refer to as “natural laws” were anything but. Natural law did not exist in their manner of thinking. All aspects of life and nature were under the direct control of the gods and as the Encyclopedia Britannica points out “Egypt had one of the largest and most complex pantheons of gods of any civilization in the ancient world.”¹⁵ Israel’s 400 plus years of being in bondage in Egypt would have exposed them daily to this belief system, especially since one of their primary tasks was the construction of Pharaoh’s storage

¹⁴ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 154ff.

¹⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/list/11-egyptian-gods-and-goddesses>

cities of Pithom and Raamses (Exo. 1:11). We know from archeological excavations that structures in Egypt were decorated with images of the Egyptian pantheon of gods. Add to this the fact that Judaism had not yet developed into a distinct faith yet but was more of a “family religion” in the way of thinking in the ancient world. This faith began with Abram’s encounter with the LORD in Genesis 12:1-3. In this regard John H. Walton observes that:

The Hebrew Bible makes clear that monotheism was not part of Abraham’s religious heritage. Abraham was of general Semitic stock, described in the Pentateuch as “Aramaeans” (Gen. 25:20; 28:5; Deut. 26:5). Joshua 24:2 and 14 assert that the relatives of Abraham, including his father, served other gods, and the text of Genesis gives us no reason to question that assessment. Jacob has to urge his company to put away their other gods (Gen. 35:2-4), and *teraphim*, the images of the ancestral family gods are important in Laban’s religious practices (Gen. 31). It is clear then, that the biblical record does not attribute monotheism of any sort to the family of Abraham. In addition, we would search in vain for any passage in which Abraham or any of the patriarchs denies the existence. Nevertheless, the perspective of the biblical text is that all of the worship of Abraham that is recorded is focused on a single deity, though that deity is called by different names. The Bible, however, nowhere explicitly insists that this is the only God that Abraham ever worshipped. It can be safely inferred from the biblical data that Abraham showed a distinct preferential loyalty for a single god.¹⁶

Walton’s perspective is confirmed by words from the prophet Ezekiel when he recalls Israel’s history in the wilderness with the following words:

I am the LORD your God. ⁶ On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of Egypt into a land I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all lands. ⁷ And I said to them, “Each of you, *get rid of the vile images you have set your eyes on, and **do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt.*** I am the LORD your God.

¹⁶ John H. Walton. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible, Second Edition.* 112-113.

⁸ *But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on, **nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt** ...* ¹⁵ Also with uplifted hand I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land I had given them—a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all lands— ¹⁶ because they rejected my laws and did not follow my decrees and desecrated my Sabbaths. *For **their hearts were devoted to their idols**.* ¹⁷ Yet I looked on them with pity and did not destroy them or put an end to them in the wilderness - Ezekiel 20:5-17 (emphasis added).

In spite of God’s command that “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exo. 20:3) Israel never fully abandoned their practice of idolatry. In addition to the examples mentioned above we should remember that Israel’s first response when Moses delayed in coming down from Mt. Sinai was to ask Aaron to create a “golden calf” to lead them back to Egypt (Exo. 32:1-24). Idolatry was Israel’s “go to” response to difficulties.

Their exposure to the gods of Egypt would have had a tangible impact on the spiritual life of Israel. We refer to this practice as syncretism or hybridity and is defined as “... the result of adaptations and assimilation of either native or immigrant cultures or languages to the dominant culture or language.”¹⁷

This way of thinking about the ancient gods would have had a tangible impact on the spiritual life of Israel. They were exposed daily to gods and practices that were not consistent with what the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob was or what He required of them. When Moses appeared on the scene and threw down challenges to Pharoah many theologians believe he was directly confronting the gods that the Egyptians worshipped

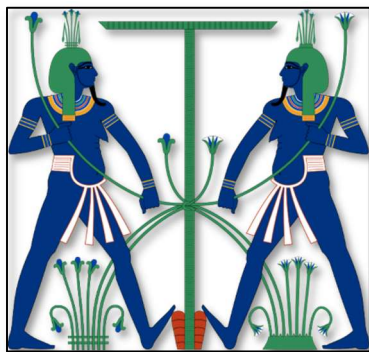
¹⁷ Johnston. (2004). *Religions of the ancient world: a guide, What is Ancient Mediterranean Religion?*, Fritz Graf. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. 10.

and served. This view is expounded in an article on the Theology Schools website. The content and images that follow are from that material. ¹⁸

The God of Israel is greater than all other Egyptian Gods and Goddesses.

Moses was called as God’s instrument to convince Pharaoh to allow the Israelites freedom from their bondage of slavery to the Egyptians. These “wonders” he performed are more commonly referred to as “plagues” sent from the God of Israel, as a proof that the “one true God” was far greater than all of the multiple Gods of the Egyptians.

These Egyptian Plagues were harsh and varied to correspond to the ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses that were prevalent during Moses’ time in Egypt.



#1: Hapi - Egyptian God of the Nile

Egyptian Plague - Water Turned to Blood

The first plague from God was that of turning the water to blood. As Aaron, the spokesperson for Moses, touched the “rod” of the Lord to the Nile River it immediately turned to blood, all the fish died, and the river stank. Partially able to duplicate this miracle, the magicians of Pharaoh also turn water into blood, leaving Pharaoh unimpressed with this great wonder from God.

Seven days the water throughout all the land of Egypt remained in this state, unsuitable for drinking, the perfect length of time to demonstrate that the Lord was superior to all the other Gods of Egypt.

¹⁸ ONE GOD sends TEN Plagues For TEN Egyptian gods and goddesses, Theology School, January 13, 2021, <https://theologyschool.org/2021/01/13/one-god-sends-ten-plagues-for-ten-egyptian-gods-and-goddesses/>

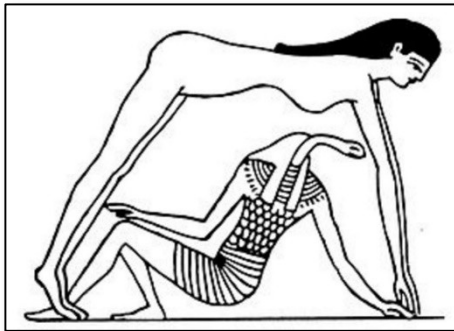


#2: Heket - Egyptian Goddess of Fertility, Water, Renewal

Egyptian Plague - Frogs coming from the Nile River

The second plague that was visited upon Egypt, from the “rod” by Aaron, was that of frogs. The frogs came up from the river and were in their houses, in their food, in their clothing, in every place possible. From the greatest to the least, no one in Egypt escaped the plague of frogs.

Pharaoh’s magicians were able to bring more frogs in their attempt to imitate the power of God, but only Moses was able to make the frogs go away.

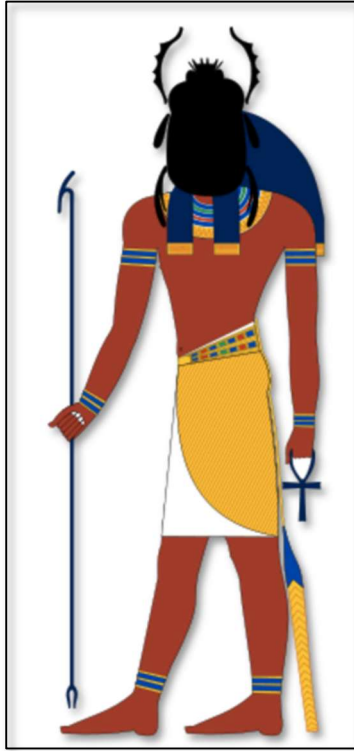


#3: Geb - Egyptian God of the Earth

Egyptian Plague - Lice from the dust of the earth

At the command of the Lord to Moses, Aaron was told to stretch forth his rod and smite the dust of the earth. When he did the dust became lice throughout all the land, on both people and beasts. The very dust that was referred to in the creation process of man is now used to plague men, as a reminder of his mortality and sin which both lead to death.

Finally, the magicians of Pharaoh are humiliated, being unable to compete with this power that was so much greater than themselves and the powers that they had from their Egyptian gods and goddesses, and they profess, “this is the finger of God.” This was the last plague that required Aaron’s involvement, as the next set of three plagues are issued by the word of Moses himself.



#4: *Khepri* - Egyptian God of creation, movement of the Sun, rebirth

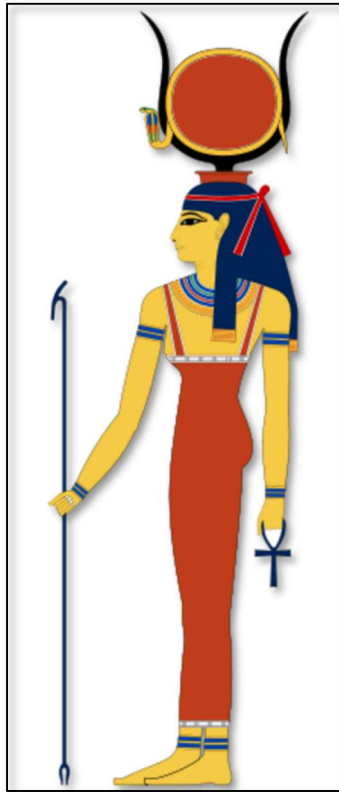
Egyptian Plague - Swarms of Flies

With the fourth Egyptian plague, which consisted of flies, begins the great miracle of separation. Moses met Pharaoh at the Nile River in the morning and made the demand, speaking on behalf of the Lord, “Let My people go, that they may serve Me.” Again, Pharaoh hardened his heart and disregarded the request, resulting in a pronouncement of swarms of flies.

This time, however, only the Egyptians are affected by the plague, and the children of Israel remain unscathed. This wonder also moves the Egyptian plagues to a different level, adding destruction as well as discomfort to the consequence of their decisions.

Plagued by flies, Pharaoh tried a new tactic and begins bargaining with the Lord, showing his desire to maintain power and authority over God. He tries to dictate the terms and conditions of the offer, telling them they may sacrifice but only “in the land” clearly not complying with the requested “three days journey” that the Lord required. Moses wouldn’t budge, and Pharaoh relented allowing them to leave, but telling them not to “go very far.

This temporary allowance is made solely to have Moses “intreat the Lord that the swarms of flies may depart.” At this point Pharaoh has learned in part who the Lord is and asks for His assistance over the Egyptian gods and goddesses. As soon as the request is granted by the Lord, Pharaoh reneges on his promise and will not let them go and continues to worship his Egyptian Gods.



#5: Hathor - Egyptian Goddess of Love and Protection

Egyptian Plague- Death of Cattle and Livestock

This plague was given with an advanced warning, allowing a period of repentance to occur, which goes unheeded.

“Tomorrow” the hand of the Lord would be felt upon all the cattle and livestock, of only the Egyptians, as “grievous murrain.” This means that disease and pestilence would fall upon their livestock with so severe a consequence as to cause them to die. This plague affected the Egyptians by creating a huge economic disaster, in areas of food, transportation, military supplies, farming, and economic goods that were produced by these livestock. Still Pharaohs heart remained hard and he would not listen to the Lord but remained faithful to the Egyptian gods and goddesses.



#6: Isis - Egyptian Goddess of Medicine and Peace

Egyptian Plague - Ashes turned to Boils and Sores

The sixth plague is unannounced and for the first time, directly attacking the Egyptian people themselves. Moses took ashes from the furnace of affliction and threw them into the air. As the dust from the ashes blew all over Egypt, it settled on man and beast alike in the form of boils and sores.

As with the previous two plagues a distinction is drawn between the Egyptians and the children of Israel, as God gives protection to his covenant people. The severity of the judgment of God has now become personal, as it is actually felt by the people themselves.

Cleanliness being paramount in the Egyptian society, this plague pronounces the people “unclean.” The magicians who have been seen throughout the previous plagues are unable to perform ceremonially rituals

to their Egyptian Gods and Goddesses in this unclean state, not allowing them to even stand before Pharaoh; they are seen in the scriptural account no more. It is great to notice the contrast shown as Moses and Aaron are the only ones left standing in front of Pharaoh, with the “One True God” as their support.



#7: Nut - Egyptian Goddess of the Sky

Egyptian Plague- Hail rained down in the form of fire

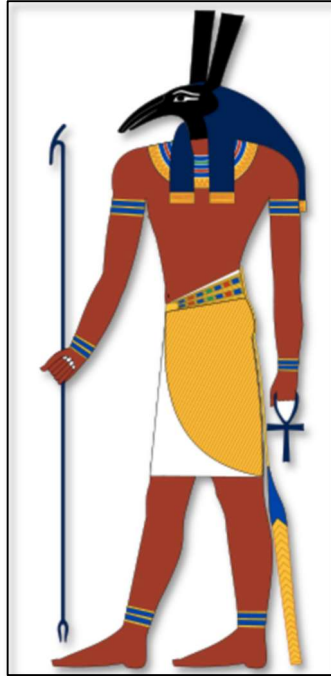
Pharaoh is warned of the impending doom that will be faced if he does not listen to the Lord, and forget his own

Egyptian gods and goddesses.

Hail of unspeakable size and ability to destroy, would rain down from the sky and turn to fire as it hit the ground. The Lord, in showing Pharaoh that “there is none like Him in the Earth”, allows those who are willing to hear His word, and do as He commands, to be saved.

A division is now felt between the Egyptians in the form of those “converted” to the Lord, as shown by their obedience and willingness to escape to the protection of their “houses.”

Interestingly enough, the crops that were destroyed by the hail consisted of flax and barley, which were ripening in the fields. These two particular crops were not the mainstay of their diet but were used more specifically for their clothing and libations. This destruction would make their life uncomfortable, but as far as effecting their food supply, the wheat still survived. This gave the Egyptians still another chance to turn to “the One True God”, and forsake their own Egyptian gods and goddesses, thus showing His mercy and grace even yet.



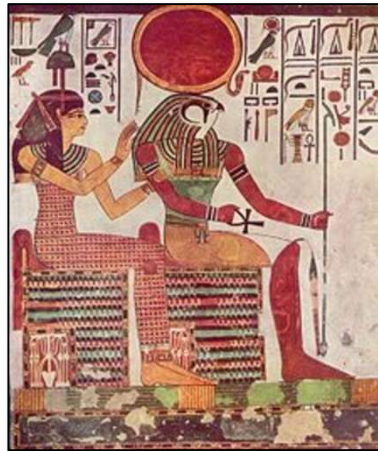
#8: Seth - Egyptian God of Storms and Disorder

Egyptian Plague - Locusts sent from the sky

The eighth plague issued by the Lord had an even greater purpose than all the others, it was to be felt so that Pharaoh would tell even “his sons and son’s sons” the mighty things of the Lord, thus teaching even future generations of the power of the “strong hand of God” over all the other Egyptian gods and goddesses.

Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh with the same request, “Let my people go so that they may serve me”, and pronounced the judgment of locusts if not heeded. This is the second wave of destruction to follow the hail, and whatever crops were left intact after that display, were

now completely consumed by the swarms of locusts that were unleashed from the sky. This wonder definitely affected their life source. By hitting them in their food supply, the Lord displayed the possibility of eminent death if a change of heart did not occur. Yet still, Pharaoh would not listen.



#9: Ra - The Sun God

Egyptian Plague - Three Days of Complete Darkness

Darkness now fell upon Egypt, unannounced, as a prelude to the future fate to be felt by the Egyptian empire when the message of the Lord was not heeded, and they still turned to their own Egyptian gods and goddesses. Three days of palpable darkness, that was so immense it could be physically felt, covered

the land of Egypt.

The sun, the most worshipped God in Egypt other than Pharaoh himself, gave no light. The Lord showed that he had control over the sun as a witness that the God of Israel had ultimate power over life and death. The psychological and religious impact would have been profound. Darkness was a representation of death, judgment and hopelessness. Darkness was a complete absence of light.



#10: *Pharaoh* - The Ultimate Power of Egypt

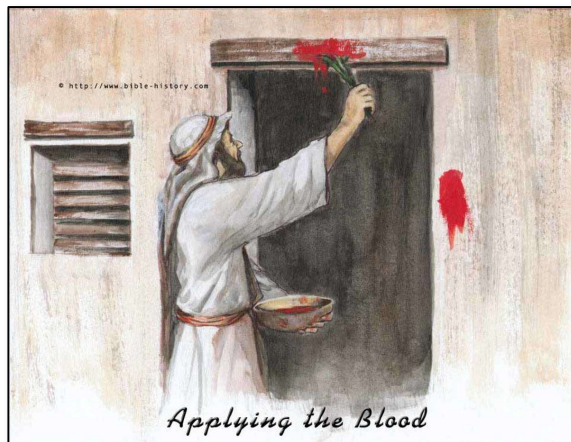
Egyptian Plague- Death of the Firstborn

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, was worshipped by the Egyptians because he was considered to be the greatest Egyptian God of all. It was believed that he was actually the son of Ra himself, manifest in the flesh.

After the plague of darkness felt throughout the land was lifted, Pharaoh resumed his position of “bargaining with the Lord” and offered Moses another “deal.” Since virtually all of the Egyptian animals had been consumed by the judgments of the Lord, Pharaoh now consented to the request made, to let the people go, but they must leave their animals behind.

Enraged by the refusal, Pharaoh pronounced the last deadly plague to be unleashed upon the land from his very own lips as he warns Moses, “Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in *that* day thou seest my face thou shalt die.”

And Moses said, “Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that *is* behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it anymore.”



At this point the passive obedience that the children of Israel have shown is now moved to a level of active obedience. They are given strict instructions to follow so that they do not also feel the judgment of this last plague sent by the Lord. These instructions are known as “The Feast of Passover”, “The Feast of Unleavened Bread”, and “The Law of the

Firstborn.” In these rituals are displayed the law of sacrifice, the law of the gospel, and the law of consecration, all necessary requirements to receive ultimate salvation from spiritual death.

These ten plagues would have upended the Egyptian religious system and proven that Yahweh alone is supreme and to be worshipped and served. These same Egyptian gods are ones that Israel was probably quite familiar with in their day-to-day lives as slaves in Egypt. The plagues must have sent shock waves through the land of Goshen, where Israel lived, as well. Based upon the thoughts of John H. Walton, earlier in this section, this writer would contend that Israel must have been impacted by the religious practices they were surrounded by.

Yahweh Himself makes it clear that these ten plagues were designed and executed as His judgment against the gods of Egypt. We are told in Exodus 12:12 that “I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and fatally strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the human *firstborn* to animals; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments—I am the LORD. And again, in Numbers 33:4 we read that “while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn whom the LORD had fatally struck among them. The LORD had also executed judgments against their gods.”

These passages make it clear that central to God’s confrontation with Pharaoh was to show both Egypt and Israel that Yahweh alone is God and worthy of worship.

Impact of Slavery

No nation can come through over 400 years of political slavery, as did Israel and not be forever changed by the experience. This paper will not delve into a detailed analysis of Israel’s experience in Egypt but simply provide an overview of how the

nations experience may have impacted them. Kenneth Chelst in his book *Exodus and emancipation: Biblical and African-American slavery*¹⁹ compares these two historical events and uses them to enlarge our understanding of each event and of the reality of slavery in general. He notes that in Israel's experience:

Joseph's family arrived in Egypt as invited and honored guests of Pharaoh. Joseph, who had started his sojourn in Egypt as a slave and became second only to Pharaoh in authority, advised his brothers to use their occupational needs as an excuse for living apart from the mass of Egyptians... This privileged status lasted more than one hundred years, throughout the lives of the original arrivals. Within this setting, "They multiplied and increased very greatly so that the land was filled with them." (Exodus 1:7) In any case, this new monarchy saw the Israelites' size and power as a threat. Pharaoh stirred a primordial fear that has been used against Jews and other minorities throughout history; that in the event of invasion, the Israelites would form a fifth column and side with the enemy.

Pharaoh's fear drives forward a narrative of threats against the birth of male babies as well as beatings and the general deprivation that Israel experienced under Egypt.

A person or nation that has never experienced forced slavery cannot truly understand the deep inroads that such an experience makes into the physical, emotional and mental health of an enslaved people. In her book *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* Dr. Joy DeGruy speaks to how Africans people brought to America as chattel slaves may have felt when she writes:

Perhaps of greatest impact, though, were the daily efforts of slave owners and others in authority to break the slaves will. Free will is at the core of being human. Can you imagine what it must be like to have your will assaulted on a daily basis? You live in a society that constantly reminds you that you are no different from livestock and in some cases less valuable. When you attempt to express yourself, you are beaten down.

¹⁹ Chelst, Kenneth, *Exodus and emancipation: Biblical and African-American slavery* (1st ed.). Urim Publications. 51.

When you attempt to protect your loved ones, you are beaten down. You are beaten until you call the cruelest and most vile man you know, “Master.” And God forbid you attempt to be educated or think for yourself.”²⁰

Certainly, the people of Israel understood this type of pain as well as we read in Exodus 1:12-15 that Pharaoh and his taskmasters “afflicted them”, “compelled them”, “made their lives bitter with hard labor”, “rigorously imposed on them” and then hear the cry of the people for deliverance (Exodus 2:23).

Another part of the impact of slavery is that of cultural displacement. The separation of the people from a “place” that has defined them and their family, perhaps for generations. *The Africana Bible* speaks to the importance of “place” in the Scriptures from the African perspective. One quote stands out: “For those experiencing a diaspora, a sense of both belonging and wholeness are often tied to particular sites: communities, homes, sanctuaries for worship, and the like.”²¹ In Exodus the nation of Israel is clearly living in a state of “diaspora” with no real sense of “place”, no settled place to call home and certainly not God’s promised land. This experience is true in our own day with so many people across the globe forced from their homes by famine, natural disasters and political violence and living in a state of diaspora. Knowing and trusting in God’s presence should have provided a level of stability that the environment did not.

²⁰ Joy DeGruy, PhD, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing. Newly Revised and Updated ed.* Portland, Oregon]: Joy DeGruy Publications, 2017. Print.

²¹ Hugh R. Page, Randall C. Bailey, Valerie Bridgeman, Stacy Davis, Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, Madipoane Masenya, and Rodney Steven Sadler. *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora.* Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, 2010. Print. 66.

Psychological Impacts

All of this raises the question: If God Himself was present with the nation of Israel in such a tangible manner as the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire in the midst of their camp, how do we explain their failure to trust Him in the wilderness? Part of the answer may lie in an understanding of how people react to stressful life events that we commonly refer to as “traumatic events.”

Israel had just been rescued by God from an oppressive slavery to Egypt for over 400 years. Their experiences in slavery included being beaten by Egyptian taskmasters, having the life of male babies threatened, the daily pressures and deprivation of slave existence, experiencing the plagues sent by God on Egypt, a sacrifice from each family to deter the “death angel”, a dramatic escape with the army of Egypt close behind, passing through the Red Sea, and arriving in a wilderness where there was no food or water. In today’s environment we would categorize any of those events as” traumatic” .

Psychologists point out some of the kinds of events that are known to produce trauma include military combat, natural disasters, terrorist threats, serious accidents, violent personal assault (physical, sexual, verbal), homelessness, witnessing a death, sudden death of a loved one, and long-term slavery. Any reading of the exodus event makes clear that the Israelites experienced all of these.

Looking back on the experience of Israel it is easy to criticize them for their grumbling against Moses, Aaron and God Himself as they experienced thirst, hunger and frustration at being in a wilderness instead of in the land God had promised their forefathers. As outside observers we see the tabernacle with the very presence of God hovering over it, leading the nation from one location to another and wonder why they

could not accept and trust God’s leadership? In the book of Deuteronomy when Moses delivers his final address to the nation before his death, he reminds the nation of how much their God cared for them during their journey:

- “Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power,”
— Deut. 4:37
- “The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”
— Deut. 7:7-8
- “Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, *even* you above all peoples, as *it is* this day.”
— Deut. 10:15
- “Nevertheless, the Lord your God was not willing to listen to Balaam, but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you because the Lord your God loves you.”
— Deut. 23:5

In these passages Moses highlights several ways God showed His concern and care such as “He loved your fathers”, “He personally brought you up”, His “affection” toward them and His “choice” of them. As we read of the tests that the nation faced in the wilderness and their rebellion against these tests, we should remember that all of it occurs within God’s great love and plan. Considering this, we should expect that the tabernacle and its furnishings would in some manner illustrate God’s love as well as His holiness.

How might this notion of “trauma” contribute to our understanding of the Exodus experience and the value of the tabernacle? My wife and I have volunteered for years with a ministry to homeless families with children in the greater Seattle, Washington area. This program has made us aware of the kinds of trauma that homeless people experience. The emotional highs and lows, the fears and anxieties faced are truly trauma inducing. The daily sense of fear and anxiety as a person faces their inability to control the situation and protect themselves or their children. One of the tools that social workers use in working with clients is called Trauma Informed Care (TIC). This approach provides a framework and counseling tools needed to help trauma victims with the healing process. I believe that much of Israel’s failure to trust God may find its explanation in the multiple traumas they had experienced.

The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) discusses trauma in a fact sheet that says,

“Most everyone has been through a stressful event in his or her life. When an event, or series of events, causes a lot of stress, it is called a traumatic event. Traumatic events are marked by a sense of horror, helplessness, serious injury, or the threat of serious injury or death.”

The factsheet continues,

“A person’s response to a traumatic event may vary. Responses include feelings of fear, grief and depression. Physical and behavioral responses include nausea, dizziness, and changes in appetite and sleep pattern as well as withdrawal from daily activities. Responses to trauma can last for weeks to months before people start to feel normal again.”²²

²² *Helping Patients Cope with a Traumatic Event*,
<https://www.cdc.gov/masstrauma/factsheets/public/coping.pdf>

¹⁰ *Helping Patients Cope with a Traumatic Event*

But not all people return to their previous equilibrium quickly. We know even from the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11 here in the United States or from PTSD experiences among military personnel, some never recover fully while others do. The chart on the following page from the CDC summarizes some of what the Israelites may have experienced:

Common Responses to a Traumatic Event ²³

Cognitive	Emotional	Physical	Behavioral
<input type="checkbox"/> poor concentration <input type="checkbox"/> confusion <input type="checkbox"/> disorientation <input type="checkbox"/> indecisiveness <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> shortened attention span <input type="checkbox"/> memory loss <input type="checkbox"/> unwanted memories <input type="checkbox"/> difficulty making decisions	<input type="checkbox"/> shock <input type="checkbox"/> numbness <input type="checkbox"/> feeling overwhelmed <input type="checkbox"/> depression <input type="checkbox"/> feeling lost <input type="checkbox"/> fear of harm to self and/or loved ones <input type="checkbox"/> feeling nothing <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> feeling abandoned <input type="checkbox"/> uncertainty of feelings <input type="checkbox"/> volatile emotions	<input type="checkbox"/> nausea <input type="checkbox"/> lightheadedness <input type="checkbox"/> dizziness <input type="checkbox"/> gastro-intestinal problems <input type="checkbox"/> rapid heart rate <input type="checkbox"/> tremors <input type="checkbox"/> headaches <input type="checkbox"/> grinding of teeth <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fatigue <input type="checkbox"/> poor sleep <input type="checkbox"/> pain <input type="checkbox"/> hyperarousal <input type="checkbox"/> jumpiness	<input type="checkbox"/> suspicion <input type="checkbox"/> irritability <input type="checkbox"/> arguments with friends and loved ones <input type="checkbox"/> withdrawal <input type="checkbox"/> excessive silence <input type="checkbox"/> inappropriate humor <input type="checkbox"/> increased/decreased eating <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> change in sexual desire or functioning <input type="checkbox"/> increased smoking <input type="checkbox"/> increased substance use or abuse

Building off this chart, let's just pick one "response" from each category above to see if we can find parallels in the experiences of the nation of Israel. Under **Cognitive** the response of "shortened attention span" is clear in that they grumbled over and over again whenever there was a lack of water, yet God had consistently provided for this need. Under **Emotional** a good example might be their sense of "being abandoned" by Yahweh and thus pleading to return to Egypt. Under the heading of **Physical** responses, we could point to their response of "fatigue" in that they tired of the manna God provided and begged for meat instead. And finally, under the heading of **Behavioral** we could point to their "change in sexual desire or functioning". This is especially evident in the event of the Golden Calf and the orgy Israel held around that event as the Apostle Paul points out (1 Corinthians 10:8). The Exodus narrative is filled

with experiences and commentary that points to a wide range of trauma inducing experiences, and their responses.

In our attempt to understand the purpose of the tabernacle in the wilderness this writer believes that the tabernacle itself in some way might have provided support for those who were traumatized. Lest you think that this approach to understanding of the Exodus story is just so much “whitewashing” or “blame-shifting”, over the past several decades many discoveries have been made in the fields of psychology, neuroscience and the human response to trauma. Obviously, I am not a trained psychologist or neurosurgeon but was surprised in my research at how well trauma might be understood as a mitigating factor in the life of Israel.

Trauma Hermeneutics

An entirely new field of Biblical study has emerged in recent decades called “Trauma Hermeneutics”. This approach to Biblical analysis looks at events in the Bible through the lens of trauma to better understand the underlying stressors of these events.²⁴ I believe that this view holds great promise for better understanding the Bible. This author believes that this lens of “trauma” is vital to understanding the failure of Israel in the wilderness.

A recent book titled *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* is a collection of essays by various Christian writers exploring this concept in specific Bible passages. One comment from the introductory section of the book provides clarity:

Within the field of psychology, the study of trauma focuses on the range of responses evoked by an experience perceived to pose an extreme threat and that overwhelms an individual’s ordinary

²⁴ Elisabeth Boase, and Christopher G. Frechette. *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*.

means of coping. The degree to which the person is conscious of the threat may vary. The experience may involve a single incident or an ongoing situation of captivity, disaster, or systemic oppression.”²⁵

Trauma Shatters our Assumptions about Life

Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, professor emerita of psychology at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, has done extensive research and treatment in the field of trauma and has developed a valuable concept for understanding its effects. Her early research focused on the subject of victimization and trauma. In her book *Shattered Assumptions: Toward a New Psychology of Trauma*, she speaks of the basic assumptions people hold that are often shattered by the reality of traumatic experiences:

Most generally, at the core of our assumptive world are abstract beliefs about ourselves, the external world, and the relationship between the two. More specifically, and most simply, I propose that our three fundamental assumptions are:

The world is benevolent - In general people believe that the world is a good place.

The world is meaningful - We believe that events in our world are meaningful, that they "make sense."

The self is worthy - in general we perceive ourselves as good, capable and moral individuals ²⁶

²⁵ Elizabeth Boase, and Christopher G. Frechette. *Bible through the Lens of Trauma*. Atlanta, Georgia: SBL, 2016. Semeia Studies; Number 86. Web. 4.

²⁶ Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Toward a New Psychology of Trauma*. 6, 8, 11.

The nation of Israel was just coming out of 400 plus years of political slavery during which the world was not benevolent, it was not meaningful, and they were not worthy. It is this author's conviction that these experiences of life should be taken into consideration in any observations made about the first generation that came out of Egypt.

Neuroscience

A great deal of research has been done in the field of neuroscience trying to understand how trauma impacts human beings mentally, emotionally and physically. Bessel van der Kolk, MD has spent his professional life studying how children and adults adapt to traumatic experiences. He translates emerging findings from neuroscience and attachment research to develop and study a range of effective treatments for traumatic stress and developmental trauma in children and adults. In his book, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* he introduces this topic with the following comments:

... the birth of three new branches of science has led to the exploration of knowledge about the effects of psychological trauma, abuse and neglect. These new disciplines are neuroscience, the study of how the brain supports mental processes; developmental psychopathology, the study of the impact of adverse experiences on the development of mind and brain; and interpersonal neurobiology, the study of how our behavior influences the emotions, biology and mind-sets of those around us.

Research from these new disciplines has revealed that trauma produces actual physiological changes including a recalibration of the brains alarm system, and increase in stress hormone activity, and alterations in the system that filters relevant information from irrelevant. We now know that trauma compromises the brain area that communicates the physical, embodied feeling of being alive. These changes explain why

traumatized individuals become hypervigilant to threat at the expense of spontaneity in engaging in their day-to-day lives. They also help us understand why traumatized people so often keep repeating the same problems and have such trouble learning from experience. We now know that their behaviors are not the result of moral failures or signs of lack of willpower or bad character – they are caused by actual changes in the brain. ²⁷

This book provides a better understanding of the importance of this field of study in both its scientific and practical implications. But there are other considerations in our thoughts about how trauma may have affected the nation of Israel.

Trauma is Intergenerational

In addition to the concept of trauma hermeneutics and the impact of trauma on the human mind and body, there is also a recent field of psychology called Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome pioneered by Dr. Joy DeGruy. She defines PTSS as

... a condition that exists as a consequence of multigenerational oppression of Africans and their descendants resulting from centuries of chattel slavery. A form of slavery which was predicated on the belief that African Americans were inherently/genetically inferior to whites. This was then followed by institutionalized racism which continues to perpetuate injury.”²⁸

²⁷ Bessel Van der Kolk. *The body keeps the score: brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking. 2014. 2-3

²⁸ Dr. Joy Angela DeGruy, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*,

Although her work addresses African American slave populations specifically, many of the principles she shares apply generally to slave populations both historical and current.

There is not time in this paper to explore how this syndrome impacts an enslaved population for centuries after the event itself. Suffice to say the people of Israel were certainly traumatized by their enslavement and this would have exhibited itself in their day-to-day reactions to stress inducing situations. This consideration should overlay any study of the Tabernacle and God’s statement that He would “dwell” in their midst. This paper asserts that the three factors of God’s presence, God’s Law and the tabernacle may have served as God’s means for addressing their multiple traumas with healing and recovery. In modern terms these elements might be considered Trauma Informed Care.

Trauma Informed Care

The Center for Healthcare Strategies points out that: “**Trauma-informed care shifts the focus from “*What’s wrong with you?*” to “*What happened to you?*”** A trauma-informed approach to care acknowledges that health care organizations and care teams need to have a complete picture of a patient’s life situation – past and present – to provide effective health care services with a healing orientation. Adopting trauma-informed practices can potentially improve patient engagement, treatment adherence, and health outcomes, as well as provider and staff wellness. It can also help reduce avoidable care and excess costs for both the health care and social service sectors.”²⁹

²⁹ [What is Trauma-Informed Care? - Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center \(chcs.org\)](https://www.chcs.org/what-is-trauma-informed-care/). Website.

This same website includes a six-part approach to Trauma Informed Care that they believe healthcare providers should inculcate into their practices to support traumatized individuals. The graphic below summarizes their findings and practices followed by a section highlighting possible parallels in the Exodus narrative.

Safety
Throughout the organization, patients and staff feel physically and psychologically safe

Trustworthiness + Transparency
Decisions are made with transparency, and with the goal of building and maintaining trust

Peer Support
Individuals with shared experiences are integrated into the organization and viewed as integral to service delivery

Collaboration
Power differences — between staff and clients and among organizational staff — are leveled to support shared decision-making

Empowerment
Patient and staff strengths are recognized, built on, and validated — this includes a belief in resilience and the ability to heal from trauma

Humility + Responsiveness
Biases and stereotypes (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, geography) and historical trauma are recognized and addressed

(Adapted from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's "Guiding Principles of Trauma-Informed Care.")

Safety: Throughout the organization, patients and staff feel physically and psychologically safe.

The Exodus narrative is filled with examples of how God provided for Israel’s safety. Consider how Yahweh shielded them from the most drastic plagues, including the death plague, how He shielded them from Pharaoh’s army and destroyed that same army.

Trustworthiness & Transparency: Decisions are made with transparency and with the goal of building and maintaining trust.

We see this principle in action in Exodus 18:24-26 where we read “So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything that he had said. Moses chose able men

out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. Then they judged the people at all times; they would bring the difficult matter to Moses, but they would judge every minor matter themselves.”

Peer Support: Individuals with shared experiences are integrated into the organization and viewed as integral to service delivery.

By redeeming Israel from Egyptian slavery and moving them into a “wilderness” the people were free from external human threats to their security. Within this environment of family and friends with a shared experience they could find mutual understanding and support.

Collaboration: Power differences – between staff and clients – are leveled to support shared decision making.

They had Moses, his selected co-leaders as well as a priestly organization who could support the nation’s need for justice and reconciliation on a day-to-day basis.

Empowerment: Patient and staff strengths are recognized, built on and validated – this includes a belief in resilience and the ability to heal from trauma.

In the Exodus story we find that God becomes so frustrated with the nation that He wants to simply end them and start over with Moses. But in the midst of this, Moses pleads with Yahweh to be patient with the nation (Exodus 32). Moses believed strongly in the nation’s ability to return to God and heal.

Humility & Responsiveness: Biases and stereotypes (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, geography) and historical trauma are recognized and addressed.

After the nation “all responded with one voice: “Everything that the LORD has said we will do.” (Exo. 19:8) God gave them not only the Ten Commandments but also numerous additional instructions in Exodus 21-23 about how to treat their own slaves, guardrails on expressing violence against others, showing respect for animals and for other people, property rights, and even about not oppressing immigrants in their midst.

Although the Bible makes no specific claims to being a manual for mental health and healing it does provide examples of God providing for His people in such a way as to make healing and recovery possible.

In his book *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel*, Nahum M. Sarna speaks at length about the experience of the nation of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai where the people encountered a personal and fear inducing interaction with God Almighty. He makes the point that this experience and the tabernacle are tightly woven together. He says that “Through its instrumentality (the Tabernacle), the experience with the Divine Presence that occurred at Sinai could be extended as a living reality.”³⁰ And he continues this thread later remarking that:

The national experience with God that occurred there would be sustained and nourished through the presence of the sanctuary in the midst of the camp of Israel. This close association between the Tabernacle and Sinai is expressed in a number of ways.

During the theophany, the mount was separated into three distinct zones of increasing degrees of holiness and restriction of access. At the foot of the mount stood the people, and there the altar was setup; in which the laity had access. Higher up on the mount was the second zone of holiness, to which only the priests and elders were admitted. Corresponding to this in the Tabernacle was the Holy place, which was restricted to the priesthood. The summit of the mountain constituted the third zone, which was exclusively reserved for Moses. Its counterpart in the Tabernacle was the Holy of Holies. Just as the Lord communicated with Moses on the mountaintop, so He does in the Holy of Holies, and in the same way that

³⁰ Nahum M. Sarna. *Exploring Exodus: the Heritage of Biblical Israel*. 190-203.

the cloud covered Mount Sinai after Moses had ascended, so the Tabernacle became enveloped in cloud on its completion, and the pillar of fire hovered over both Sinai and it.³¹

Collective Trauma

Before leaving this topic, one more element of trauma needs to be mentioned although I found myself a little hesitant at first to give too much credit to this perspective. After all, we are talking about somewhere between 600,000 and 2.4 million people. Certainly not all of them succumbed to the pressure of their traumas. Weren't there some in that first generation, besides Caleb and Joshua, who processed these traumas and healed? While looking for answers to this question I encountered the topic of "mass trauma" or "collective trauma" which looks at how traumatic events can affect large numbers of people on multiple continents. A 2020 article from the *Psychology Today* website provides valuable insight:

Whereas the term "trauma" typically refers to the impact that a traumatic incident has on an individual or a few people, collective trauma refers to the impact of a traumatic experience that affects and involves entire groups of people, communities, or societies. Collective trauma is extraordinary in that not only can it bring distress and negative consequences to individuals but in that it can also change the entire fabric of a community (Erikson, 1976). In fact, collective trauma can impact relationships, alter policies and governmental processes, alter the way the society functions, and even change its social norms (Chang, 2017; Hirschberger, 2018; Saul, 2014). For example, after the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, the United States altered their transportation and travel policies and procedures to enhance security. Although this traumatic incident occurred 19 years ago, the societal changes in travel policy can still be seen today.

Collective trauma is a response that can follow a variety of traumatic experiences. Situations that may elicit a collective trauma response may include but are not limited to: wars, natural disasters, mass shootings, terrorism, pandemics, systematic and historical oppression, recessions, and famine or severe poverty (Aydin, 2017; Chang, 2017;

³¹ Nahum M. Sarna. Exploring Exodus: the Heritage of Biblical Israel. 190-191.

Hirschberger, 2018; Saul, 2014). Traumatic experiences like the ones listed above can lead to an onset of physiological, psychological, relational, societal, and spiritual consequences as reality is turned upside down. Although the trauma is dealt with collectively, the experiences and individual responses can vary greatly which may lead to increased confusion about what collective trauma looks like.³²

In our own day the COVID-19 pandemic that started in 2019 shut down businesses, offices, factories, schools and restaurants. It threw the entire world into “lockdown”. Although much recovery has occurred, we are still experiencing its impact in areas such as educational shortcomings, manufacturing and delivery services still struggling to recover, political divisions and others. I think it behooves us to extend the same courtesy to the ancient Israelites in terms of withholding judgment that we expect others to extend to us in our recovery journeys.

³² <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/lifting-the-veil-trauma/202005/what-is-collective-trauma>

PART THREE: “GOD WITH US” AND THE TABERNACLE AS GOD’S INSTRUMENTS OF HEALING AND RECOVERY

In the previous section I asserted that the failure of the first generation of Israelites in the wilderness may find explanation in their multiple experiential traumas. In this section I would like to argue that God provided three solutions to bring healing and recovery for these traumas and that these solutions can be found in God’s presence, God’s Law and God’s Tabernacle.

Yahweh did not leave Israel without the means of healing from their traumas. In fact, this author would argue that the tabernacle and its furnishings were intended to point the nation to how to trust God instead of murmuring and complaining, but that they did not draw on this resource to grow and heal. Revisiting Janoff-Bulman’s earlier reference to how trauma shatters our assumptions about life one could make the case that God’s presence, God’s Law and the tabernacle speaks to each of her points:

- **The world is benevolent** – The tabernacle structure and God’s presence over the mercy seat attended by the pillar of fire at night and the pillar of cloud during the day should have sent a clear message that the LORD God Almighty was present to protect and provide for them if they would only rest in Him.
Repeatedly God stated His love for Israel (Deut. 4:7-8, 7:7, 10:15, 23:5), they simply refused to believe Him.
- **The world is meaningful** – The presence of God rose off the tabernacle when it was God’s time for them to move on. They all knew that the goal was the Promised Land, and that God was leading them to that goal. ***Their lives had purpose***

and meaning!

- **The self is worthy** – One of the most powerful images of God’s love for Israel was seen in the High Priests garments. The onyx stones on the shoulder pads were engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel, six on each stone. Beyond this, the ephod contained twelve gems one for each tribe of Israel, with their name engraved on it. When the High Priest went into the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, he bore the people before God. Beyond this was the Altar of Incense where the prayers for the people ascended before God, day and night. ***They were worthy, for Yahweh made them worthy.***

One thing we may overlook in the Exodus story is that by removing Israel from Egypt and leading them into a wilderness experience where they were confined to the closeness of their family units with no external threats to their safety, God may have provided a key element for effective trauma recovery. Dr. Bessel Van der Kolk observes that:

Traumatized human beings recover in the context of relationships: with families, loved ones, AA meetings, veterans’ organizations, religious communities, or professional therapists. The role of those relationships is to provide physical and emotional safety, including safety from feeling shamed, admonished, or judged and to bolster the courage to tolerate, face, and process the reality of what happened. ³³

³³ Bessel Van der Kolk. *The body keeps the score: brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. 210.

God's Presence

The fullest expression of “God with us” was reached in Exodus 40:34–38 when the tabernacle had been installed and Yahweh’s divine presence came down,

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Throughout their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. *For throughout their journeys, the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel.*” (*Italics added*).

This was a truly a remarkable event in the ancient world, not only was Yahweh present and visible but He also personally led Israel from place-to-place. On a practical note, we should remember that throughout their time in the wilderness there were multiple times when Israel failed to trust God (Ex. 5:21; 14:11; 15:24; 16:2; 17:2-3; 32:1; Num. 11:1, 4; 12:1; 14:2), yet these experiences of being “tested” by God occurred in places to which He led them. John Walton speaks to this unique relationship of a god to a people group when he writes:

In the ancient Near East at large this service (to the god) was accomplished in terms of caring for the god through ritual and preserving order in society and the cosmos. In Israel it was accomplished by obeying the Torah, which showed them how to love the Lord their God with all their hearts and minds and strength and to reflect the holy status that God had given them by maintaining Torah order ... No other culture in the ancient Near East understood themselves in such a relationship to the divine realm.³⁴

³⁴ John H. Walton. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible, Second Edition*.119.

God's Law

In our contemporary western worldview, we tend to view God's Law as a restrictive and negative imposition, a violation of a peoples' freedom. But what if it designed by God to provide a sense of freedom they had never experienced before? John Walton explains that "In the ancient Near East it was the rare exception that anyone thought that they could identify with confidence the cause of a deity's anger. Since there was no revealed code of conduct."³⁵ If there is one thing that Torah Law did provide Israel with, it was clear guardrails for what would provide order and structure to their daily life and what would not. They did not have to try and guess which god they had offended or what the remedy was. The Law spelled out clearly God's expectations and the consequences they would experience if they failed to obey. These laws were for their protection and blessing, not to restrict their freedom.

Case in point, immediately after the confirmation of the Covenant between Yahweh and the nation (Exo. 19:1-7) God lays down a number of laws related to their daily living (Exo. 20-22). These included what we commonly refer to as the Ten Commandments, plus several other regulations related to the treatment of slaves, violence against others, respect for private property, theft & restitution, liability issues and others. These "laws" would have served as "guardrails" on how a people should treat one another. God's Law and its prohibitions well may have been key to the survival and expansion of the nation of Israel in an environment (wilderness wandering) that may have destroyed any other people group.

³⁵ IBID, Walton, 107

God's Tabernacle

John Walton puts the tabernacle into the larger picture of God's plan for the nation of Israel when he explains that:

Although Moses is the primary human character of the Exodus narratives, the real story is the redemptive work of Yahweh in delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt and establishing a unique covenant relationship with the nation. These acts of God signaled his good intentions to keep the promises made generations ago to Abraham and the other patriarchs (cf. 3:7-16). Israel's exodus from Egypt is the redemption event of the Old Testament. Along with the Covenant ceremony at Sinai it constitutes the high-water mark of Old Testament salvation history.³⁶

They also point out that "The tabernacle structure was designed to symbolize the active presence of the Lord among the Hebrews."³⁷

This view of the tabernacle means that each furnishing and element in the tabernacle might be considered instrumental to God's intention to bring healing and recovery to traumatized Israel.

Perhaps a couple of comments about my own personal work experience will help the reader to understand what I saw when reading the tabernacle descriptive text. Over a lifetime of work, my experience has been in two major fields: 1) creating technical manuals/documentation for the tech industry, and 2) the building trades. In the year 2020 I retired from a residential and commercial remodeling company in the greater Seattle area.

³⁶ Andrew E., Hill, and John H. Walton. 1991. *A survey of the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House). 103

³⁷ Hill and Walton. *A survey of the Old Testament*. 120.

My experience in the construction industry served as a lens to what I read in Exodus 25-30 and 35-40. These extremely detailed instructions to Moses on the tabernacle and its furnishings read like a set of Construction Design Specifications for a building project. Attorneys Shipman and Wright, LLP say that such specifications ... “describe in precise detail the materials to use and methods to employ when performing the work on a construction project, and the contractor must not deviate from the provided specifications.”^[38] Based on this awareness I scheduled an interview with a local remodeling company owner who has several people on his staff who create Design Specifications and project designers in a construction project. ^[39] I expected to hear about the qualifications needed to be a successful Construction Designer, things such as creativity, professional training, technical expertise and knowledge of applicable building codes. Instead, his first comment was that *the primary job requirement is skill in “listening and communication”*. The ability to build a relationship with a client and truly hear what they are saying.” Of course, all the other skills are needed but the real key to creating a design that reflects the wants and needs of the client is to be able to really “hear” what they are saying and translate that into a functional plan and detailed specifications of materials, colors and textures that reflects their vision of the completed project. Applying this to the story of the Exodus we might think of Yahweh as the “client” and Moses’ job was to “hear” what God was trying to communicate to him. This understanding led to the thought that this structure and its creation might have grown out of the close relationship between God and Moses. A relationship of free and open communication between the two of them. Reviewing Moses’ encounters with Yahweh makes this seem more tenable. Moses first encountered “the angel of the LORD” at the burning bush (Exo. 3:2) where a conversation was initiated by the angel. In both

chapters 3 and 4 of Exodus we find a running conversation between Moses and God with Moses trying to argue why he is not the right person to lead Israel from their slavery to Egypt and God countering every objection. Then there were regular conversations throughout the plagues on Egypt as God led Moses to confront Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. And finally, there is an interesting comment about the relationship between Moses and Yahweh in Exodus 33:7-11 where we read that:

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp ... Whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and the Lord would speak with Moses ... ***So the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend ...*** (emphasis added).

Mark Scarlata speaks to the unique relationship between Moses and Yahweh when he says, “Moses is the only person in the Old Testament who speaks to YHWH face to face, and we are made privy to these conversations.”³⁸

This relational communication dynamic appears to be in play when God calls Moses up to Mount Sinai to meet with Him and Moses then spends 40 days and 40 nights in God’s presence. (Exodus 25:40). Obviously, there was a lot of content regarding how Israel was to live (the Law) and the construction of the tabernacle, but 40 days and 40 nights is a long time to **BE** in God’s presence. Some level of comfort seems to be present in this encounter. Certainly, more than just getting “information” from Yahweh to pass on to Israel!

³⁸ Mark Scarlata, *The abiding presence: a theological commentary on Exodus*. SCM Press. 2018, 41.

All of this carries the sense that Yahweh was not simply dictating His Law and the tabernacle plans to Moses, but that theirs was a deep personal relationship, and that the nation of Israel was clearly aware of the uniqueness of this relationship (see Exodus 34:29). It is this writers' conviction that the *Design Specifications* for the tabernacle and its furnishings grew out of this unique "relationship" between Moses and Yahweh. That Moses possessed that ability to really "hear" what God desired in construction of the tabernacle.

Upon reading of Exodus 25-30 and 35-40 it became clear that the tabernacle and its furnishings would have required a lot of metals such as gold, silver and bronze, thousands of board feet of acacia wood, thousands of yards of fine linen fabric (or the mature flax plants needed to make the linen), an assortment of ram skins, goat skins as well as porpoise or badger skins, plus a variety of gemstones.

This begs the question "Where did they get all of these materials?" The answer can be found in a couple of passages. In Genesis 15 as God is making His covenant agreement with Abram, God tells him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions." (Gen. 15:13–14). The second part of the answer can be found in Exodus 12:35-36 that as Israel was fleeing Egypt, they "...had requested from the Egyptians articles of silver and articles of gold and clothing; and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have their request. Thus, they plundered the Egyptians." What a sight it must have been. One can

almost visualize the Israelites leaving Egypt with carts, wagons and pack animals carrying off tons of goods.

Words Matter

As a *Design Specification* document, the description of each item in the tabernacle is highly structured. Each item is introduced with the phrase “They shall construct” or “you shall make” (25:10, 25:23, 25:31, 26:1, 26:7; 26:15, 26:31, 27:1, 27:9, 28:1–39, 30:1–8). Following each of these initial directives are many additional statements of “Then you shall make...”, leaving the reader with a sense that this was intended to be read as a materials specification.

For this analysis thirty-six words stood out as describing materials to be used for constructing the tabernacle and its furnishings in Exodus 25–30 and were considered “key words.” The English word for each item was looked up in multiple Bible translations, searching for variations. Then the Hebrew for each was consulted to see if there was a lot of variation in the original language. These words included contribution, dwell, sanctuary, tabernacle, pattern, Acacia wood, ark, gold, silver, bronze, mercy seat, cherubim, table (of showbread), lampstand, curtains of fine twisted linen, covering of Goat skins, covering of ram skins dyed red, covering of fine leather above, boards, sockets, breast piece of judgement, ephod, robe, tunic of checkered work, turban, sash, purple, scarlet, blue, ruby, topaz, emerald, turquoise, sapphire, diamond, jacinth, agate, amethyst, beryl, onyx, jasper, Urim & Thummin, laver of bronze, anointing oil. A chart comparing these words side-by-side in four different translations can be found in Appendix A.

For the number of individual items in these chapters there is surprisingly little variation from translation to translation and most of these seem to be attributable to imprecise understanding of early Hebrew and/or the use of different words with similar meanings. For example, the NASB2020 version of Exodus 26:14 says, “And you shall make a covering for the tent of rams’ skins dyed red and a covering of fine leather above”. Strong’s Concordance defines the fine leather (H5785) from the Hebrew ‘ôr which simply means “skin, hide” and can refer to any number of animals or even human skin. The NKJV uses the word “badger skins” (H8476), taḥaš meaning a kind of leather, skin or animal hide.³⁹ These terms are almost interchangeable. The same seems to be the case where different gemstones are mentioned for the ephod that the priest wore. Some seem to be subsets of one another or a stone from the same family. This author’s conclusion is that these terms are stable, interchangeable and not a major concern for interpretation.

In the *Design Specification* sheets that follow, each furnishing includes a statement of materials to be used, measurements and some core “Observations and Spiritual Significance” of each item. It follows the order found in Exodus 25 – 30 and starts with the Ark / Mercy Seat and end with the Outer Court. The “Observations and Spiritual Significance” statements are from the perspective of being symbolic of some aspect of God’s nature or character.

The following page shows a visual illustration of the tabernacle and each furnishing in our passage. Each Design Specification contains the passage detailing the

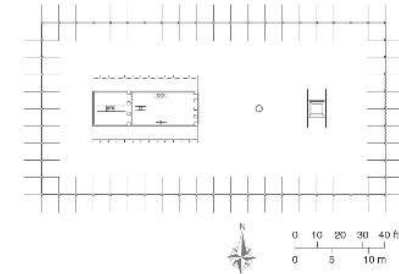
³⁹ "H5785 - 'ôr - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (nasb20)." Blue Letter Bible. Web. 28 Apr, 2022. <<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h5785/nasb20/wlc/0-1/>>.

construction and the later completion of the item along with a statement on how it would reflect the nature and character of God for the nation.

THE TABERNACLE AND COURT

The tabernacle was a portable temple—a “tent of meeting”—within a moveable courtyard (Exodus 25–31; 35–40). It was constructed after the pattern that Yahweh revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai, and was assembled in the desert as Moses led the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land. For an enlargement of the tent itself, see p. 186. The tabernacle courtyard was 150 feet (46 m) long and 75 feet (23 m) wide, totaling 11,250 square feet (1,045 square meters).

Tabernacle and Court Architectural Plan



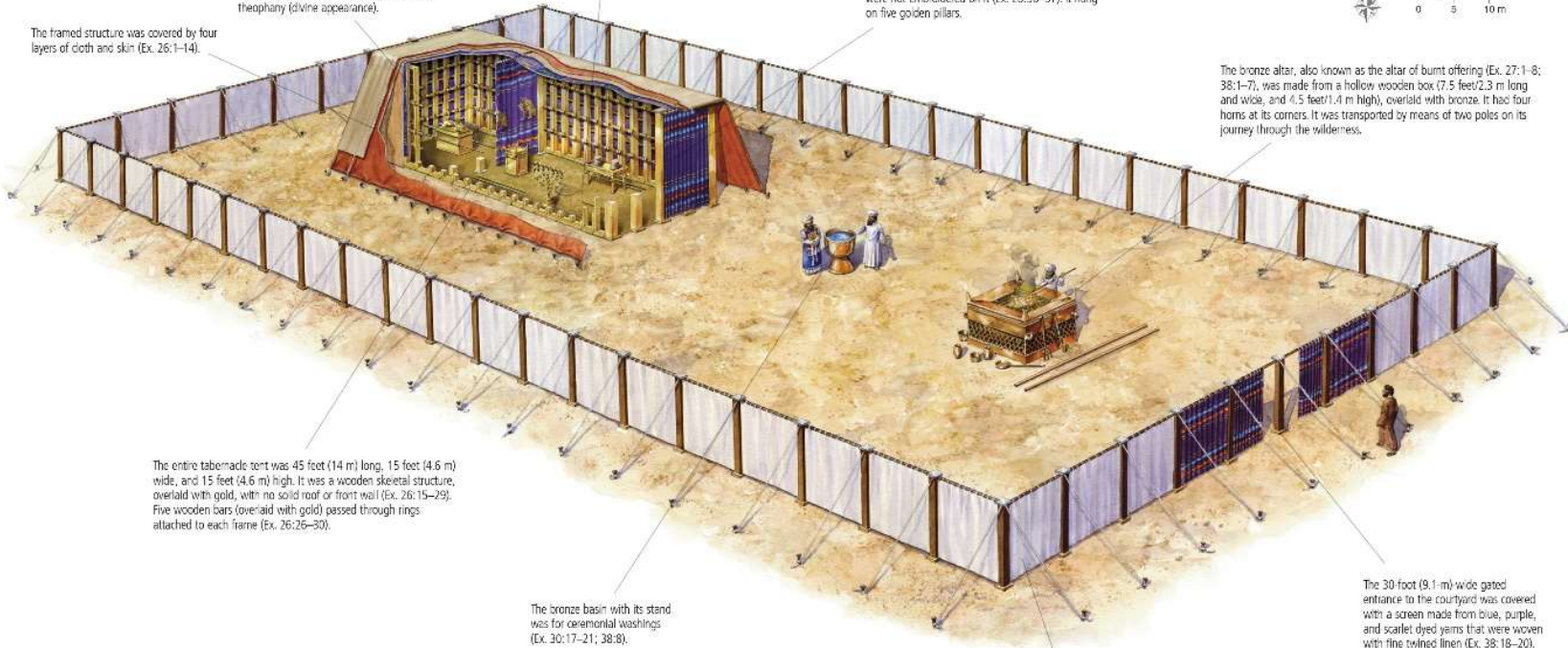
The Most Holy Place of the tabernacle tent was a 15-foot (4.6 m) cube, containing only the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:10–22; 37:1–9). It was here that Yahweh would descend to meet with his people in a cloud theophany (divine appearance).

The Holy Place of the tabernacle tent was 30 feet (9.1 m) long, 15 feet (4.6 m) wide, and 15 feet (4.6 m) high. It housed the table (Ex. 25:23–30), the golden lampstand (Ex. 25:31–40; 37:17–24), and the altar of incense (Ex. 30:1–10; 37:25–29).

The veil separating the Holy Place from the tabernacle courtyard was similar to the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, except that cherubim were not embroidered on it (Ex. 26:36–37). It hung on five golden pillars.

The framed structure was covered by four layers of cloth and skin (Ex. 26:1–14).

The bronze altar, also known as the altar of burnt offering (Ex. 27:1–8; 38:1–7), was made from a hollow wooden box (7.5 feet/2.3 m long and wide, and 4.5 feet/1.4 m high), overlaid with bronze. It had four horns at its corners. It was transported by means of two poles on its journey through the wilderness.



The entire tabernacle tent was 45 feet (14 m) long, 15 feet (4.6 m) wide, and 15 feet (4.6 m) high. It was a wooden skeletal structure, overlaid with gold, with no solid roof or front wall (Ex. 26:15–29). Five wooden bars (overlaid with gold) passed through rings attached to each frame (Ex. 26:26–30).

The bronze basin with its stand was for ceremonial washings (Ex. 30:17–21; 38:8).

The 30-foot (9.1 m) wide gated entrance to the courtyard was covered with a screen made from blue, purple, and scarlet dyed yarns that were woven with nine twined linen (Ex. 38:18–20).

The surrounding hangings (fine twined linen curtains connected to pillars and stabilized by guy ropes and pegs) stood about 7.5 feet (2.3 m) high. The 60 wooden pillars were overlaid with bronze, stood in copper sockets, and had capitals overlaid with silver (Ex. 27:9–19; 38:9–17).

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Ark of the Covenant & Mercy Seat

Specifications: Exodus 25:10-22

Completion: Exodus 37:1-9

Dimensions:

2 1/2 cubits long x 1 1/2 cubits high
(3.75' long X 2.25' wide X 2.25' high)

Materials:

- Acacia wood
- Gold overlay

Observations and Spiritual Significance:

This furnishing was symbolic of God's holiness and presense. God said, "There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel." (Exo. 25:22). This fact alone makes it the most holy furnishing in the entire tabernacle.

This great and holy God provides a place for forgiveness of the nation and a place where He speaks to and directs His people through Moses.

The website acaciawood.com points out that acacia wood is a sustainable product, that it is extremely durable, has a unique grain pattern and is commonly used to make furniture.⁴⁰ This would make acacia the perfect choice for the manufacture of the major support structures and furnishings of the tabernacle. The use of acacia would reflect that God is available to all people and He is the source of strength to sustain life.

⁴⁰ <https://acaciawoodusa.com/pages/what-is-acacia-wood/>

Gold overlay would likely be done as gold leaf applied to the acacia as there is no mention of nailing down thin sheets of gold. In the Bible as in culture in general gold symbolizes wealth, power and status. Israel's God is superior over all others.

These two elements, acacia wood and gold were used for the many of the furnishings and major structural elements in the tabernacle.

Beyond everything else it is a fully man-portable furnishing. It was specifically designed so the God dwell with them in their travels. He was not a God locked in a building somewhere.

Specification for the Ark: "You shall make ..."

- an ark of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, and one and a half cubits high.
- Overlay it with pure gold, inside and out
- Make a gold molding around it.
- cast four gold rings for it and fasten them on its four feet; two rings shall be on one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it.
- poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold.
- put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them.
- The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it.
- put into the ark the testimony which I shall give you.

Specification for the Mercy Seat: "You shall make ..."

- Make two cherubim of gold; make them of hammered work at the two ends of the atoning cover.
- make an atoning cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide.
- Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end;
- make the cherubim of one piece with the atoning cover at its two ends.
- the cherubim shall have their wings spread upward, covering the atoning cover with their wings and facing one another
- the faces of the cherubim are to be turned toward the atoning cover
- put the atoning cover on top of the ark

- in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you.
- I will meet with you ... I will speak to you about every commandment that I will give you for the sons of Israel.”



Table of Showbread or Bread of the Presence

Specifications: Exodus 25:23-30

Completion: Exodus 37:10-16

Dimensions:

2 cubits long x 1 cubit wide x 1 ½ cubits high (3' long X 1.5' wide X 2'.25' high)

Materials:

Acacia wood with gold overlay and gold border

Observations and Spiritual Significance:

In his book “A Commentary on the Book of Exodus” Umberto Cassuto points out that “The ‘bread of the Presence’ referred to in v. 30 was given to the priests to eat (Lev. Xxiv 5-9), and was kept on the table for a complete week in order that the priests who ministered to God should have the privilege of eating from God’s table.”⁴¹ As God’s representatives of the people they too participated in this special meal.

This table was not designed for feeding the deity (god) but so the deity could “feed” His people as represented by the priests. Thus, it reminds the nation that God desires to live in relationship and fellowship with His people.

⁴¹ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*. Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew U, 1983. Print, 337.

Specifications for the Table of Showbread/Bread of Presence:**“You Shall Make ...”**

- A table of acacia wood, two cubits (3 feet) long and one cubit wide (1.5 feet), and one and a half cubits (1.5 feet) high
- Overlay it with pure gold and
- A gold border around it
- A rim of a hand width around it; and you shall make a gold border for the rim around it
- Four gold rings for it and put rings on the four corners which are on its four legs. The rings shall be close to the rim, as holders for the poles to carry the table
- Poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold, so that with them the table may be carried
- make its dishes, its pans, its jars, and its libation bowls with which to pour drink offerings; ... of pure gold
- Set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me continually.



Golden Lampstand

Specifications: Exodus 25:31-39

Completion: Exodus 37:17-34

Dimensions: No specific dimensions.

Materials: solid gold

Observations and Spiritual Significance:

The lampstand was among the most ornate pieces created for use in the tabernacle. The lampstand looked basically like a seven-branched menorah. It also resembled a tree with the cups at the end of each branch designed to mimic the appearance of almond blossoms with sculpted calyxes (outermost parts of a flower) and flowers (25:31–36). Many scholars believe that God commanded the floral design to remind the Israelites of the Tree of Life from the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9). This is certainly an appropriate observation as true life is found only in God (Ps. 16:11), and this presence was made manifest in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34–35). Almonds were also a symbol of hope and fruitfulness in the ancient Mediterranean world, so these ideas were also brought to mind when priests saw the lampstand.⁴²

Many scholars believe that the Golden Lampstand not only pointed to Yahweh as the source of light/guidance for the nation but that being designed to mimic almond blossoms pointed to the original tree of life in the Garden of Eden, offering another avenue for restoration.

⁴² <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/golden-lampstand>

Specifications for the Golden Lampstand: “You shall make ...”

- A lampstand of pure gold
- A base and its shaft ... 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 shaped like almond blossoms on the one branch, a bulb and a flower, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms on the other branch, a bulb and a flower—the same for six branches going out from 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
- bulbs and their branches shall be of one piece with it; all of it shall be one piece of hammered work of pure gold
- Lamps seven in number ... to shed light on the space in front of it
- Tongs and its trays shall be of pure gold ... from a talent of pure gold, with all these utensils.
- Follow the pattern for them, which was shown to you on the mountain

Specifications for the Table of Showbread/Bread of Presence:

“You Shall Make ...”

- A table of acacia wood, two cubits (3 feet) long and one cubit wide (1.5 feet), and one and a half cubits (1.5 feet) high
- Overlay it with pure gold and
- A gold border around it
- A rim of a hand width around it; and you shall make a gold border for the rim around it
- Four gold rings for it and put rings on the four corners which are on its four legs. The rings shall be close to the rim, as holders for the poles to carry the table

- Poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold, so that with them the table may be carried
- make its dishes, its pans, its jars, and its libation bowls with which to pour drink offerings; ... of pure gold
- Set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me continually.



43

Curtains of Linen

Specifications: Exodus 26:1-6

Completion: Exodus 36:8-13

Dimensions:

28 cubits long x 4 cubits wide (42' long X 6' wide)

Materials: Fine twisted linen

Observations and Spiritual Significance:

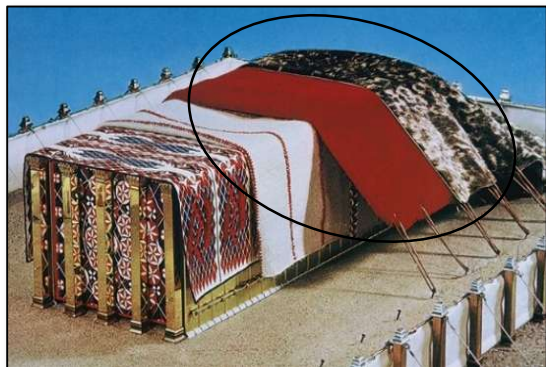
This innermost covering of the tent was woven from harvested flax plants. It was draped over the supporting side walls of the tabernacle and used the “royal” colors of violet, purple and scarlet. These curtains were joined by loops and clasps along their long edge so that they could be removed and folded as the tabernacle was moved from place to place.

Specifications for the Curtains of Linen: “You shall make ...”

- ten curtains of fine twisted linen and violet, purple, and scarlet material; you shall
- make them with cherubim, the work of a skilled embroiderer
- The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits (42 feet), and the width of each curtain four cubits (6 feet)
- Five curtains shall be joined to one another, and the other five curtains shall be joined to one another
- make loops of violet on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set, and likewise you shall make them on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the second set
- make fifty loops in the one curtain, and you shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite each other

⁴³ Messianic Revolution website, [E26-3: What was the outermost covering of the Tabernacle's tent sanctuary really made out of? - WELCOME TO THE MESSIANIC REVOLUTION \(messianic-revolution.com\)](#)

- make fifty clasps of gold
- join the curtains to one another with the clasps so that the tabernacle will be a unit



Curtains of Goat's Hair, Rams Skin and Badger Skins

Specifications: Exodus 26:7-14

Completion: Exodus 36:14-19

Dimensions: 30 cubits long x 4 cubits wide (45' long X 6' wide)

Materials: Goats hair, ram skins, badger or porpoise skins

Spiritual Significance & Observations:

The remaining three curtains were in the words of Cassuto “served only as an outer protection against rain and wind and dust and the sun’s heat.”⁴⁴ These too could be disassembled, folded and transported. One might say that in similar fashion.

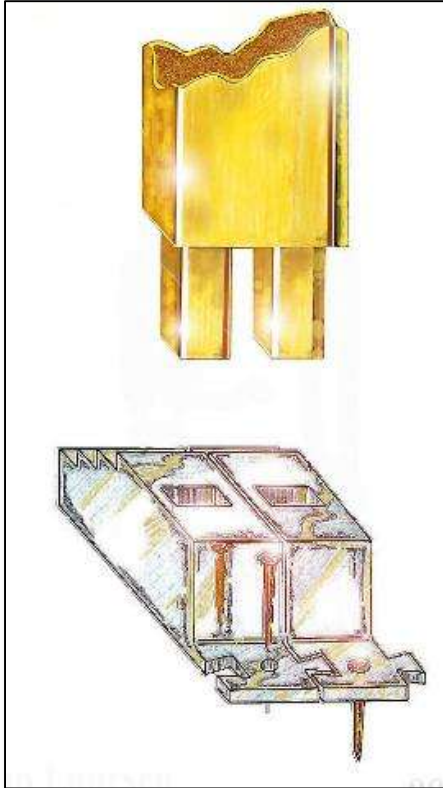
These curtains speak to Yahweh’s protection and covering over the nation from the harshest effects of the wilderness.

**Specifications for Curtains of Goat’s Hair, Ram’s Skins and Badger Skins:
“You shall make...”**

- curtains of goats’ hair as a tent over the tabernacle; you shall make eleven curtains in all.
- each curtain shall be thirty cubits (45 feet), and the width of each curtain four cubits (6 feet)
- join five curtains by themselves and the other six curtains by themselves, and you shall double over the sixth curtain at the front of the tent.
- fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the first set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the second set.

⁴⁴ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 347.

- fifty clasps of bronze ... put the clasps into the loops and join the tent together so that it will be a unit.
- The overhanging part that is left over in the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that is left over, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle.
- The cubit on one side and the cubit on the other, of what is left over in the length of the curtains of the tent, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle on one side and on the other, to cover it.
- a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red and a covering of fine leather above.



Boards & Bases for the Tabernacle

Specifications: Exodus 26:15-30

Completion: Exodus 36:20-34

Dimensions: Boards - 10 cubits x 1 1/2 cubits (15” high X 2.25” wide)

Materials:

- Acacia wood for planks
- Gold overlay
- Silver for bases

Observations and Spiritual Significance:

This section explains the size and finish for the supporting walls of the tabernacle structure. These walls would provide adequate infrastructure for the four different curtains that were to be hung over them. Again, we encounter acacia wood with gold overlay. This gold overlay would symbolize wealth, power and status. Israel’s God is superior over all others.

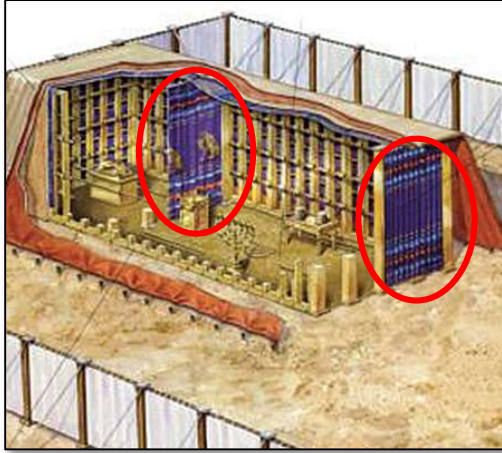
The Acacia wood would have reflected Yahweh’s accessibility while the gold would speak to His power and status.

With two gold walls, a woven screen on one end, a veil dividing the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place and a sky fabric covered with cherubim this must have been a dramatic environment.

⁴⁵ “The Tabernacle its construction and furnishings”, Part 19, <http://sickleoftruth.com/Tabernacle/TABPAGE19.html>

Specifications for the Boards and Bases: “You shall make ...”

- the boards for the tabernacle of acacia wood, standing upright. Ten cubits (15 feet) shall be the length of each board and one and a half cubits (2.25 feet) the width of each board.
- two tenons for each board, fitted to one another ... twenty boards for the south side.
- forty bases of silver under the twenty boards, two bases under one board for its two tenons and two bases under another board for its two tenons; and for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, twenty boards, and their forty bases of silver; two bases under one board and two bases under another board.
- for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, twenty boards, and their forty bases of silver; two bases under one board and two bases under another board.
- For the back of the tabernacle, to the west ... six boards.
- two boards for the corners of the tabernacle at the back. They shall be double beneath, and together they shall be complete to its top to the first ring
- eight boards with their bases of silver, sixteen bases; two bases under one board and two bases under another board.
- five bars of acacia wood, five for the boards of one side of the tabernacle,
- five bars for the boards of the other side of the tabernacle
- five bars for the boards of the side of the tabernacle for the back side to the west. The middle bar in the center of the boards shall pass through from end to end.
- overlay the boards with gold
- rings of gold as holders for the bars
- overlay the bars with gold
- erect the tabernacle according to its plan which you have been shown on the mountain.



Veil & Screen

Specifications: Exodus 26:31-37

Completion: Exodus 36:35-38

Dimensions: Sizes are not specified but would have been calculated based on the presence of pre-built wall heights and widths.

Materials:

- fine twisted linen of violet, purple and scarlet material.
- Boards of acacia wood
- Bases of silver
- Hooks of gold

Spiritual Significance and Observations:

The veil and screen are again of linen in the colors that signify the presence of royalty. Cassuto points out that due to space constraints the veil that separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place could not have been hung first as the pillars would not have left space for the ark of the covenant to pass through. Therefore the ark would have been in place first then the pillars and veil hung to cover and separate the space.⁴⁶

The veil would have created a clear separation between sinful man and a holy God. God alone determines who can and cannot approach Him.

This space was highly restricted. Evidently Moses was allowed to enter and engage in conversation with God almighty (Gen. 25:22). Besides Moses only the High Priest was allowed to enter and only once a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. He was permitted to enter the enclosure to burn incense and sprinkle sacrificial animal blood. By this act the high priest atoned for his own sins and those of the priesthood.

⁴⁶ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 360.

In addition to the veil there was a second curtain called the “screen” that would separate the Holy Place from the courtyard where the animal sacrifices were performed.

Specifications for the Veil and Screen: “You shall make ...”

- a veil of violet, purple, and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen
- with cherubim, the work of a skilled embroiderer.
- hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks also of gold, on four bases of silver.
- hang up the veil under the clasps
- bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve as a partition for you between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.
- put the atoning cover on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place
- set the table outside the veil
- the lampstand opposite the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south; and you shall put the table on the north side.
- a curtain for the doorway of the tent of violet, purple, and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, the work of a weaver.
- five pillars of acacia for the curtain and overlay them with gold, their hooks also of gold; and you shall cast five bases of bronze for them.



The Bronze Altar

Specifications: Exodus 27:1-8

Completion: Exodus 37:1-7

Dimensions: 5 cubits square x 3 cubit high
(7.5' sq. x 4.5' high)

Materials:

- Acacia wood
- Bronze overlay

Spiritual Significance & Observations:

Whenever an Israelite would pass through the curtained entrance into the outer courtyard the first thing seen would be the Bronze Altar. This is where the animal or

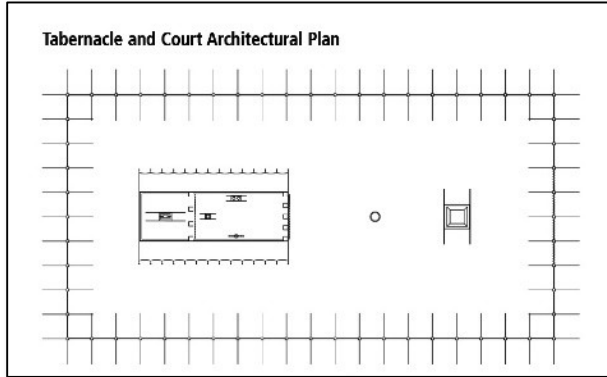
This altar made clear that humankind's first task in a relationship with God would be to humbly present an offering God has prescribed for forgiveness.

grain sacrifice would be presented to the officiating priest for sacrifice. Cassuto once more points out that "...the altar was made hallow, consisting of an empty frame of wood overlaid with bronze, which could easily be filled from time to time with earth or stones ... the fire was not kindled on the bronze ... but upon the earth or the stones in the centre."⁴⁷ It also had a bronze grate midway down for placement of the sacrifice and four horns to which the animal could be tethered.

⁴⁷ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 362.

Specifications for the Bronze Altar: “You shall make ...”

- the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits.
- its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze.
- its pails for removing its ashes, and its shovels, its basins, its forks, and its firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze.
- a grating, a netting of bronze, and on the netting you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. And you shall put it under the ledge of the altar, so that the netting will reach halfway up the altar.
- carrying poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood and overlay them with bronze
- Its poles shall be inserted into the rings, so that the poles will be on the two sides of the altar when it is carried.
- hollow with planks; as it was shown to you on the mountain, so they shall make it.



Court of the Tabernacle

Specifications: Exodus 27:9-21

Completion: Exodus 38:9-20

Dimensions: 100 cubits x 500 cubits
(150" x 75")

Materials:

- fine twisted linen using colors of violet, purple, and scarlet *material*.
- bronze bases
- silver bands

Spiritual Significance & Observations:

The court of the tabernacle was a walled enclosure. These walls were curtains of linen stretched between pillars of acacia wood with gold overlay, at equal spacing and a

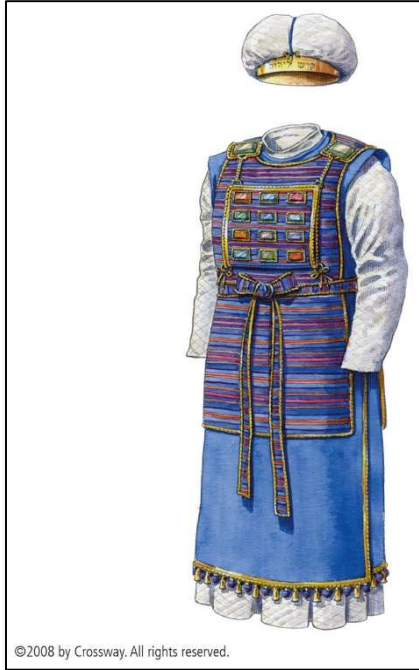
The courtyard tells us that all may approach God, Jew and Gentile alike. Native Israeli and immigrants. None are excluded, but there is only one gate into God's presence and forgiveness. God alone determines the means of approaching Him.

single gate at the east end of the courtyard. John Davis points out "It might be observed that the hangings around the outer court were exactly one half the height of the tabernacle itself which made the tabernacle plainly visible from outside the court."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Davis, John J., *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, Baker Book House, 1986. 273

Specifications for the Court of the Tabernacle: “You shall make ...”

- On the south side there shall be hangings for the courtyard of fine twisted linen, a hundred cubits (150 feet) long for one side
- its pillars shall be twenty, with their twenty bases of bronze; the hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be of silver
- for the north side in length there shall be hangings a hundred cubits long (150 feet), and its twenty pillars with their twenty bases of bronze; the hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be of silver
- the width of the courtyard on the west side shall be hangings of fifty cubits (75 feet), with their ten pillars and their ten bases
- The width of the courtyard on the east side shall be fifty cubits (75 feet).
- The hangings for the one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits (22.5 feet), with their three pillars and their three bases
- for the other side there shall be hangings of fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and their three bases.
- for the gate of the courtyard a curtain of twenty cubits, of violet, purple, and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, the work of a weaver, with their four pillars and their four bases.
- the pillars around the courtyard shall be joined together with silver, with their hooks of silver and their bases of bronze.
- The length of the courtyard shall be a hundred cubits (150 feet), and the width fifty throughout, and the height five cubits of fine twisted linen, and their bases of bronze.
- the utensils of the tabernacle used in all its service, and all its pegs, and all the pegs of the courtyard, shall be of bronze.



Priestly Garments

Specifications: Exodus 28:1-43

Completion: Exodus: Exodus 39:1-31

Dimensions: *Not applicable*

Materials:

- Gold, violet, purple and scarlet material
- Two Onyx stones mounted on shoulders of ephod and engraved with “the names of the sons of Israel, six of their names on the one stone and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, according to their birth.”
- White linen – discussed earlier.
- Gemstones: Ruby, Topaz, Emerald, Turquoise, Sapphire, Diamond, Jacinth, Agate, Amethyst, Beryl, Onyx and Jasper

Additional Observations:

The most complex element in the creation of the tabernacle is found in the explanation of the Priestly Garments. Complete detailing of these items is too complex for a paper such as this, so instead it will focus just on some of the elements of the Ephod and the gemstones in particular. This paper will not trace the history of each gemstone and its relationship to the specific tribes, but this topic would be one worthy of additional research. It is enough to say that each gemstone had the name of one of the twelve tribes engraved on it to represent each tribe of Israel so that as the High Priest entered into the very presence of Yahweh, he would “carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment/decision making over his heart when he entered the Holy Place, as a memorial before the LORD continually.”

These garments place the nation of Israel front and center in God’s attention. These people, whom Yahweh delivered from bondage to Egypt were His top priority and, in His heart continually.

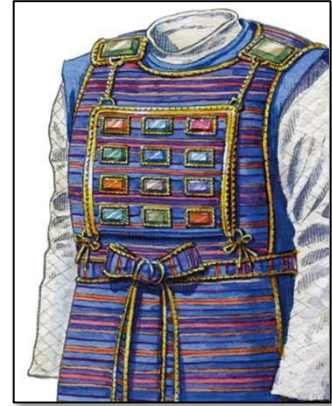
Specifications for the Priestly Garments: “You shall make ...”

- holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.

These are the garments which they shall make:

- a breastpiece,
 - an ephod,
 - a robe,
 - a tunic of checkered work,
 - a turban,
 - and a sash.
- holy garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so that he may serve as priest to Me. .
 - the ephod of gold, of violet, purple, and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen, the work of the skilled embroiderer.
 - It shall have two shoulder pieces joined to its two ends, so that it may be joined. The skillfully woven band of its overlay, which is on it, shall be like its workmanship, of the same material: of gold, of violet and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen.
 - take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, six of their names on the one stone and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, according to their birth ... set them in filigree settings of gold.
 - put the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of memorial for the sons of Israel, and Aaron shall carry their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial.
 - filigree settings of gold, and two chains of pure gold; you shall make them of twisted cord work, and you shall put the corded chains on the filigree settings.
 - a breastpiece of judgment ... of gold, of violet, purple, and scarlet material, and fine twisted linen

- square *and* folded double, a span in length and a span in width.
- mount on it four rows of stones; the first row *shall be* a row of ruby, topaz, and emerald; and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond; ¹ and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; ²⁰ and the fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper; they shall be set in gold filigree.
- The stones shall be *engraved* according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, according to their names; they shall be *like* the engravings of a signet, each according to his name for the twelve tribes.
- on the breastpiece twisted chains of cord work in pure gold.
- on the breastpiece two rings of gold, and shall put the two rings on the two ends of the breastpiece.
 - put the two cords of gold on the two rings at the ends of the breastpiece.
 - put the *other* two ends of the two cords on the two filigree *settings*, and put them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, at the front of it.
- two rings of gold and place them on the two ends of the breastpiece, on the edge of it, which is toward the inner side of the ephod.
- two rings of gold and put them on the bottom of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, on the front of it close to the place where it is joined, above the skillfully woven band of the ephod. And they shall bind the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a violet cord, so that it will be on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece will not come loose from the ephod.
- So Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the Holy Place, as a memorial before the LORD continually.
- put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the Lord; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the Lord continually.
- make the robe of the ephod all of violet.



- an opening at its top in the middle of it; around its opening there shall be a binding of woven work, like the opening of a coat of mail, so that it will not be torn.
 - on its hem pomegranates of violet, purple, and scarlet *material* all around on its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, all around on the hem of the robe.
 - It shall be on Aaron when he ministers; and its sound shall be heard when he enters and leaves the Holy Place before the LORD, so that he will not die.
- You shall also make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engravings of a signet, 'Holy to the Lord.'
 - fasten it on a violet cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban. It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take away the guilt of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, regarding all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, so that they may be accepted before the LORD.
- weave the tunic of checkered work of fine linen, and shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash, the work of a weaver.
 - Aaron's sons you shall also make tunics;
 - sashes for them,
 - caps for them, for glory and for beauty.
 - linen undergarments to cover their bare flesh;
 - they shall reach from the waist even to the thighs.
 - they shall be on Aaron and on his sons when they enter the tent of meeting, or when they approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place, so that they do not incur guilt and die.



Urim and Thummin

Specifications: Exodus 28:30

Completion: Not applicable

Dimensions: None given

Materials: Thought to be stones, but open to question.

Additional Details: other passages that refer to them include Leviticus 8:8; Numbers 27:21; Hosea 4:12; Zechariah 10:2; Ezra 2:63; Nehemiah 7:65.

Additional Observations:

The Urim and Thummin are somewhat shrouded in mystery. The *Blue Letter Bible* says that Urim (אֲדָמָה) means "lights" and were stones kept in a pouch on the high-priest's breastplate, used in determining God's decision in certain questions and issues.⁴⁹ And that Thummin (תְּמִימִים) means "perfection" and was a stone provided for the means of achieving a sacred lot. Used with the Urim to reveal God's will.⁵⁰ These items are mentioned here and in Leviticus 8:8 and Numbers 27:21 and other passages.

Although we may not understand clearly what these were for or how they were used in the life of the nation of Israel, they do tell us that when God leads His people from slavery to freedom it often looks like wilderness and wandering. But even here He uses means that we simply don't understand to confirm or deny our decisions and He can be trusted to lead us on a daily basis.

⁴⁹ "H224 - 'ûrîm - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (nasb95)." *Blue Letter Bible*. Web. 22 Apr, 2022. <<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h224/nasb95/wlc/0-1/>>.

⁵⁰ "H8550 - tummîm - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (nasb95)." *Blue Letter Bible*. Web. 22 Apr, 2022. <<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h8550/nasb95/wlc/0-1/>>.

The website Jewish Virtual Library adds that:

The Urim and Thummim (Heb. אֲוִרִים וְתַמִּיּוֹת) was a priestly device for obtaining oracles. On the high priest's ephod (an apron-like garment) lay a breastpiece (חֹשֶׁן) – a pouch inlaid with 12 precious stones engraved with the names of the 12 tribes of Israel – that held the Urim and Thummim (Ex. 28:15–30; Lev. 8:8). By means of the Urim, the priest inquired of YHWH on behalf of the ruler (Num. 27:21; cf. Yoma 7:5, "only for the king, the high court, or someone serving a need of the community"); they were one of the three legitimate means of obtaining oracles in early Israel (Urim, dreams, prophets; I Sam. 28:6).⁵¹

Sakenfeld adds that additional research on the Old Testament makes it clear that even with extensive research over the decades by many different scholars these “are words of uncertain etymology” and that scholars differ on how exactly how they were used and what they looked like.⁵²

⁵¹ Jewish Virtual Library, *Ancient Jewish History: The Urim and Thummin*, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-urim-and-thummim>

⁵² Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, GE., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, S-Z, Volume 5*, 2000, Abington press, p. 719.



Altar of Incense

Specifications: Exodus 30:1-8

Completion: Exodus

Dimensions: 1 cubit square by 1 ½ cubit high (18” square x 36” high)

Materials:

- Acacia wood
- Gold overlay

The altar of incense would remind Israel to pray and be assured that their prayers were pleasing to Yahweh.

Observations and Spiritual Significance:

The following quote is from Ligonier Ministries website and provides an insightful comment on this item.

Scripture often likens incense to the prayers of God’s people (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8). This makes sense when we consider what happened on the altar of incense. Fine spices were mixed together and left to smolder on the altar day and night (Ex. 30:7–8, 34–38), the ascending smoke symbolizing that what was offered there went up to God, much as our prayers go up to Him. Being set outside the veil, the priest would see the smoke penetrate the curtain into the Holy of Holies even though He could not see past the curtain (v. 6). And is this not like prayer in that we know our prayers enter heaven itself even though we cannot yet see into that place?

Yet they were not inherently sweet, for atonement had to be made for the altar once a year (v. 10). John Calvin comments, “The altar of incense was purified by the sprinkling of blood, that they might learn that their prayers obtained acceptance through sacrifices.”⁵³

Specifications for the Altar of Incense: “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 (18” sq.); it shall be square, and its height shall be two cubits; its horns shall be of one piece with it.
- overlay it with pure gold, its top and its sides all around, and its horns;
- make a gold molding all around it.
- two gold rings for it under its molding; you shall make them on its two sides—on opposite sides—and they shall be holders for poles with which to carry it.
- poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold.
- put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the atoning cover that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you.
- burn fragrant incense on it ... There shall be perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generation

⁵³ *The Altar of Incense*, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/altar-incense>



Laver of Bronze

Specifications: Exodus 30:17-21

Completion: Exodus 38:8

Dimensions: No dimensions given

Materials: Bronze/brass

The role of the Laver of Bronze was to serve as a place for the priests to wash both their hands and feet, prior to entering the tent of meeting.

Additional Observations:

This particular item in God's Design Specifications comes with few design requirements and a dire warning if it is not used by the priests. Strong's Concordance lists the Hebrew word "basin" as H3595, כִּיֹּר kîyôwr, kee-yore'; or כִּיֹּר kîyôr; from the same as H3564; properly, something round (as excavated or bored), i.e., a chafing-dish for coals or a caldron for cooking; hence (from similarity of form) a washbowl; also (for the same reason) a pulpit or platform: — hearth, laver, pan, scaffold. And as H5178 נְחֹשֶׁת nêchôsheth, nekh-o'-sheth; for H5154; copper, hence, something made of that metal.⁵⁴ It was used for ceremonial cleansing of the priest before entering the tabernacle structure itself.

Specifications for the Basin of Bronze: "You shall make ..."

- a basin of bronze, with its base of bronze, for washing; and you shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it.
- Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet from it; when they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water, so that they do not die;

⁵⁴ "H3595 - kîyôr - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (nasb20)." Blue Letter Bible. Web. 28 Apr, 2022. <<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h3595/nasb20/wlc/0-1/>>.

or when they approach the altar to minister, by offering up in smoke a fire sacrifice to the Lord.

- So they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they do not die; and it shall be a permanent statute for them, for Aaron and his descendants throughout their generations.

This brief examination of the materials used in the construction of the tabernacle shows us that each material and furnishing served as a visual aid of God’s holiness and His provision for forgiveness and healing.

God was truly “dwelling” with them. In addition to this the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22; Nehemiah 9:12) should have been ample evidence of the reality of God’s presence.

In each Design Specification above you may have noted that there was a “Specification” heading and a “Completion” heading. It is important to mention at this juncture the event that takes place between the end of the specifications in chapter 30 and the narrative of the tabernacle being assembled beginning in chapter 35. Moses has now been up on the mountain top receiving input directly from Yahweh and the people become restless at his 40-day delay. In their distress they ask Aaron to make an idol that can lead them to return to Egypt. Aaron complies, gathers gold from the people and fashions a “molten calf” declaring “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 32:4).

What follows is a scene of Yahweh’s anger that the nation could turn away so quickly from Him and a threat to simply be done with these “obstinate” people and

destroy the nation. Chapters 32 and 33 detail the efforts of Moses to dissuade God from this plan and accompany them on the remainder of the journey.

We have seen that the nation of Israel had everything they needed to heal and recover from the traumas they experienced but most did not, and God allowed that first generation to perish in the wilderness. Dr. Paul Conti in his book shares a very interesting interview he had with Dr. Daryn Reicherter on the topic of worldview. Dr. Reicherter notes that “worldview matters because worldview is one of the factors that determine how people experience their trauma and how they go on to develop after it.”⁵⁵ So too our “worldview” of God and His presence can influence how successfully we process traumatic events.

As mentioned earlier Israel never truly abandoned their attachment to foreign idols either in the first generation or in succeeding generations. This writer would argue that their worldview of Yahweh and refusal to abandon idolatry was the root cause of their demise. Let’s turn now to the Christian Scriptures (New Testament) and get the Apostle Paul’s perspective on the cause of their failure.

⁵⁵ Conti, Paul (MD). (2021). *Trauma: the invisible epidemic: how trauma works and how we can heal from it*. Interview with Daryn Reicherter, MD, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and current director of the Human Rights in Trauma Mental Health Laboratory at Stanford University. 85

CONCLUSIONS

Israel's Experience

Understanding WHY Israel failed in the wilderness is important to followers of Christ today so that we will not follow in their same footsteps. Here we turn to the Apostle Paul and his observations regarding the Exodus narrative to gain insight. As a Jew trained in both Torah and tradition, he certainly is qualified to help us understand the exodus experience and how to not repeat Israel's mistakes. In 1 Corinthians 10:1 – 14 he writes:

For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers *and sisters*, that our fathers were all under the cloud and they all passed through the sea; ² and they all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; ³ and they all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased; for *their dead bodies* were spread out in the wilderness.

⁶ Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they indeed craved *them*. ⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND TO DRINK, AND ROSE UP TO PLAY." ⁸ Nor are we to commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. ⁹ Nor are we to put the Lord to the test, as some of them did, and were killed by the snakes. ¹⁰ Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were killed by the destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹² Therefore let the one who thinks he stands watch out that he does not fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except *something* common to mankind; and God is faithful, so He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

God's Provision

In verses 1-4 Paul starts out by pointing out that every person who was a part of

the exodus shared in a unique community exposure to God's presence in the pillar of cloud and fire, in being delivered from the Egyptian army, in accepting God's provision of manna daily and having their thirst quenched by water that God provided throughout their journey. These elements provided the entire community with a bond that they could draw upon in the hard times. But Paul also makes it clear that they never really came to trust this God who provided so abundantly for them.

Israel's Response

Then in verses 6-10 he points out several areas in which they failed followed by the injunction to see them as an example of attitudes and actions to avoid. These included being idolators, sexual immorality, putting God to the test multiple times and just general grumbling about their life and circumstances.

The decisive statement in this section is found in verse 14 where he says "*Therefore, my beloved, flee idolatry.*" Here we are faced with the root of Israel's failure, and we are back to what we talked about earlier that Israel NEVER abandoned their idols (Ezekiel 20:5-17). This was a clear violation of the very first commandment God issued to the nation,

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them nor serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, (Exodus 20:1-5).

The old saying "The more things change, the more they stay the same" certainly applies to the topic of idolatry. The website dictionary.com defines idolatry as "the

religious worship of idols, excessive or blind adoration, reverence, devotion, etc.”⁵⁶ The very thing that followed Israel throughout their history continues to plague humankind today. The practice of giving anything or anyone else the attention and devotion that belongs only to our creator God. What kinds of things might be considered “idols” in our culture today?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money or materialism • Jobs and success • Physical appearance • Entertainment or entertainers • Sex • Comfort • The American dream • Politics and political opinions • Religious affiliations and beliefs • Family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technology and/or social media • Guns and the second amendment • Environmental activism • Self-image/self esteem • Approval of friends or colleagues • Personal or family security • Health and wellness/sports • Food • Intellect and education • Pop psychology/self-help tools
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Mind you, none of these items are bad in themselves, the issue we are addressing is that anything that occupies my thoughts, time and money may be considered an idol. It may not be bowing down to a wooden statue or image but simply has replaced my love for God and devotion to Him. Anything I count on to meet my deepest needs could be considered an idol as it takes the place of the creator God in my heart and mind.

⁵⁶ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/idolatry>

Paul's Own Experience

The Apostle Paul certainly experienced his own share of trauma in his life. He provides us with an interesting summary of his experiences in 2 Corinthians chapters 11 and 12:

- Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.
- Three times I was beaten with rods,
- Once I was stoned
- Three times I was shipwrecked.
- Spent a day and night in the sea
- In dangers from rivers, robbers, own countrymen, Gentiles ...
- Sleepless nights, hunger, thirst
- Daily concern for the health of the churches
- A “thorn in the flesh to keep me from exalting myself.”

In chapter 12 verses 9-11 he tells us how he survived all of these without giving up: he recalls that God told him that “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most of us simply hope that these stress producing experiences will simply pass, but Paul’s message seems to be that it is these very things that give us spiritual depth and maturity, and that this is the ultimate goal of a life that honors God. The book of James echoes this same message when he says “Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” (James 1:2-4).

In pulling together the various strings of this study I believe there are several takeaways:

- We all come out of our bondage to the ruler of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4) by God's grace and power.
- We all bring the baggage of our lives and experiences into our new relationship with God through His son Jesus.
- We all face traumatic experiences in our lives but that as hurtful as they may be there is healing and recovery available through our relationship with God.
- That God's solutions for trauma include His presence, His guardrails for living (laws), and His provisions for daily living as revealed in the furnishings of the tabernacle.

It is my hope and prayer that these thoughts from the exodus experience bring you encouragement and help you to find healing and recovery through God's presence, the community of faith and the services of a trained professional to move you on to become the person God intends.

Appendix A: Key words

A side-by-side comparison of words used in the specifications for the tabernacle structure in Exodus 25–28, 30 yields the following results. Highlights indicate words that differ from version to version.

NASB	NKJV	NRSV	NIV
Contribution	Offering	Offering	Offering
Dwell	Dwell	Dwell	Dwell
Sanctuary	Sanctuary	Sanctuary	Sanctuary
Tabernacle	Tabernacle	Tabernacle	Tabernacle
Pattern	Pattern	Pattern	Pattern
Acacia wood	Acacia wood	Acacia wood	Acacia wood
Ark	Ark	Ark	Ark
Pure gold	Gold	Gold	Gold
Silver	Silver	Silver	Silver
Bronze	Bronze	Bronze	Bronze
Mercy seat	Mercy seat	Mercy seat	Mercy seat
Cherubim	Cherubim	Cherubim	Cherubim
Table (of showbread)	Table (of showbread)	Table (of Presence)	Table (bread of the presence)
Lampstand	Lampstand	Lampstand	Lampstand
Curtains of fine twisted linen	Curtains of fine twisted linen	Curtains of fine twisted linen	Curtains of fine twisted linen
NASB2020	NKJV	NRSV	NIV
Covering of Goat skins	Covering of Goat skins	Curtains of goat hair	Curtains of goat hair
Covering of ram skins dyed red	Covering of ram skins dyed red	Covering of tanned rams skins	Covering of ram skins dyed red
Covering of fine leather above	Covering of badger skins	Outer cover of fine leather	Other durable leather
Boards	Boards	Frames	Frames
Sockets	Sockets	Bases	Bases
Breastpiece of judgement	Breastpiece of judgement	Breastpiece of judgement	Breastpiece for making decisions
Ephod	Ephod	Ephod	Ephod
Robe	Robe	Robe	Robe
Tunic of checkered work	Tunic of checkered work	Tunic of checkered work	Tunic of checkered work
Turban	Turban	Turban	Turban
Sash	sash	sash	sash
Purple	Purple	Purple	Purple
Scarlet	Scarlet	Scarlet	Scarlet
Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue

Onyx	Onyx	Onyx	Onyx
Ruby	Sardius	Carnelian	Carnelian
Topaz	Topaz	Chrysolite	Chrysolite
Emerald	Emerald	Emerald	Beryl
Turquoise	Turquoise	Turquoise	Turquoise
Sapphire	Sapphire	Sapphire	Lapis lazuli
Diamond	Diamond	Moonstone	Emerald
Jacinth	Jacinth	Jacinth	Jacinth
Agate	Agate	Agate	Agate
Amethyst	Amethyst	Amethyst	Amethyst
Beryl	Beryl	Beryl	Topaz
Onyx	Onyx	Onyx	Onyx
Jasper	Jasper	Jasper	Jasper
Urim & Thummin	Urim & Thummin	Urim & Thummin	Urim & Thummin
Laver of bronze	Laver of bronze	Bronze basin	Bronze basin
Anointing oil	Anointing oil	Anointing oil	Anointing oil
Altar of incense	Altar of incense	Altar of incense	Altar of incense

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