

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 18

Chapters 27:1 – 28:1

In Lesson 17 we included the measurements of each item in cubits and inches. We are using 21 inches as the length of a cubit. In the book of Genesis, in the building of Noah's Ark, we used 18 inches as the length of the cubit. Why are we using different lengths for a cubit?

The different nations used different measurements for a cubit. The Hebrew measured a cubit as the length of an average man from the elbow to the first knuckles (about 18 inches). The Egyptians

measured a cubit from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger (about 21 inches). The Babylonians measured the cubit from the elbow to the tip of the pointer finger (about 20 inches). The Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Persians and other nations had their own lengths for the cubit.

Culture	Inches (centimeters)
Hebrew	17.5 (44.5)
Babylonian	19.8 (50.3)
Egyptian	20.6 (52.3)

In the Bible, most theologians accept that Noah's Ark was built to the Semite or Hebrew Cubit. However, the Egyptian cubit was used for the Tabernacle and all its furniture and utensils because it is what the Israelites had used for almost 400 years in the building projects in Egypt.

We must note that at this point in the story, the Israelites were about 120 days out of Egypt and the measuring rods they would have carried with them were those used in Egypt. It is only reasonable that the Israelites used the measurements they were accustomed to in this building project.



Examples of two ancient cubit measuring rods

Because of the differences in the lengths of the two cubits, the Hebrews ultimately adjusted their terminology to accept the original Hebrew cubit as about 18 inches and because of the longer measurements used in the building of the Tabernacle, they created what they called the long Hebrew cubit of about 21 inches.

The Altar

Exodus 27:1 "And 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. ² "And you shall make its horns on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. ³ "And you shall make its pails for removing its ashes, and its shovels and its basins and its forks and its firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze. ⁴ "And you shall make for it a grating of network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. ⁵ "And you shall put it beneath, under the ledge of the altar, that the net may reach halfway up the altar. ⁶ "And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and

overlay them with bronze.⁷ "And its poles shall be inserted into the rings, so that the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar when it is carried.⁸ "You shall make it hollow with planks; as it was shown to you in the mountain, so they shall make *it*.



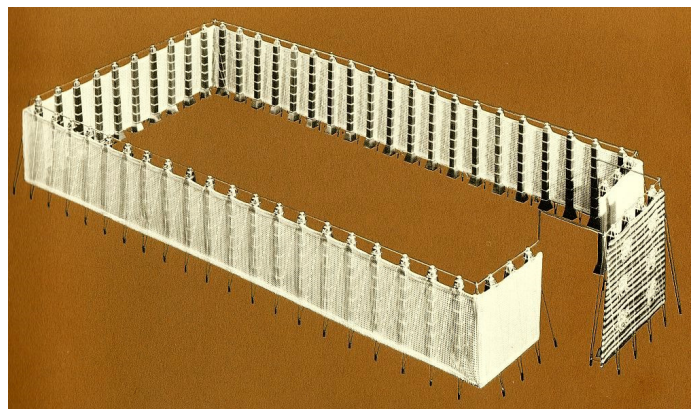
Brazen Altar

The Brazen Altar, as it will soon be called, was 8 ¾ feet square and 5 ¼ feet tall. Notice that nothing in the construction of this altar was gold because it would not hold up to the heat. All the wood of this altar was covered with bronze. Bronze is metal composed of copper. Today it includes 12% tin and other trace metals but in the days of Moses, it consisted of copper alone. Copper can be molded or hammered into various shapes and easily joined together with heat and silver used as solder.

It seems that this altar was hollow with no bottom; therefore, the juices of the meats offered on this altar would drop directly to the ground.

The Court of the Tabernacle

Exodus 27:9 "And you shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side *there shall be* hangings for the court of fine twisted linen one hundred cubits long for one side;¹⁰ and its pillars *shall be* twenty, with their twenty sockets of bronze; the hooks of the pillars and their bands *shall be* of silver.¹¹ "And likewise for the north side in length *there shall be* hangings one hundred cubits long, and its twenty pillars with their twenty sockets of bronze; the hooks of the pillars and their bands *shall be* of silver.¹² "And for the width of the court on the west side *shall be* hangings of fifty cubits *with* their ten pillars and their ten sockets.¹³ "And the width of the court on the east side *shall be* fifty cubits.¹⁴ "The hangings for the *one side of the gate shall be* fifteen cubits *with* their three pillars and their three sockets.¹⁵ "And for the other side *shall be* hangings of fifteen cubits *with* their three pillars and their three sockets.¹⁶ "And for the gate of the court *there shall be* a screen of twenty cubits, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen, the work of a weaver, *with* their four pillars and their four sockets.¹⁷ "All the pillars around the court shall be furnished with silver bands *with* their hooks of silver and their sockets of bronze.¹⁸ "The length of the court *shall be* one hundred cubits, and the width fifty throughout, and the height five cubits of fine twisted linen, and their sockets of bronze.



Curtain of the Court of the Tabernacle

The area surrounding the Tabernacle had a material wall as seen in the picture of the *Curtain of the Court of the Tabernacle*. The dimensions of the court were 175 feet long by 87 ½ wide.

The opening to the court always faced the east. On the east side the gate (or screen) was 35 feet wide. The short walls on each side of the gate were 26 ¼ feet long.

Twenty pillars held the curtain on the long south side, 20 on the long north side, 10 on the west and 3 on each side of the opening on the east. Four pillars were used for the gate (screen).

No gold was used in the construction of this outer wall. As indicated, only bronze (copper) and silver were used for the sockets and hooks.

The curtain was 8 ¾ feet high which meant that the 17 ½ foot tall Tabernacle could always be seen rising above this outer wall of the court.

The Use of Bronze (Copper)

Exodus 27:19 "All the utensils of the tabernacle *used* in all its service, and all its pegs, and all the pegs of the court, *shall be* of bronze.

Bronze (copper) was the LORD's material of choice for the pitchers, plates, bowls, platters, altar and the hooks as well as the tent pegs used to secure the various parts to the ground and in contact with the weather, liquids and heat.

The Lampstand to Burn Continually

Exodus 27:20 "And you shall charge the sons of Israel, that they bring you clear oil of beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually.

Once the Tabernacle was completed and the lighting of the Lampstand occurred, that light was never to be extinguished. Oil was to be extracted from the olives and strained to remove all solid substances. The clear oil was to be furnished by all of Israel which is mentioned here and emphasized greater later in the Scripture.

The Order in the Tent of Meeting

Exodus 27:21 "In the tent of meeting, outside the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD; *it shall be* a perpetual statute throughout their generations for the sons of Israel.

At times, many commentators have disagreed concerning the terminology of the Tabernacle and the Tent of Meeting. Some have rendered them as two separate tents; however, it seems clear that the Tent of Meeting was the same as the Tabernacle because in this passage the Veil was located within its walls and so was the testimony (Ark of the Covenant). Also, in Exodus 25:22, the LORD indicated that He would speak with Moses from His Glory resting on the Mercy Seat in this Tent of Meeting. It was going to be the responsibility of Aaron and his sons to keep the front room of the Tabernacle, called the Holy Place, in order. The bread was to be on the Table,

the Lampstand was to be kept burning and the Altar of Incense, which has not been described yet, was to be kept fueled with aromatic incense.

Some discussion exists in theology circles as to whether the Lampstand burned continuously or not. When the Scripture says that Aaron and his sons were to keep the order “**from evening to morning,**” some have taken that to mean that the Lampstand was not lit during the daylight hours. However, this is a misunderstanding of the terms evening and morning. Today, we understand that evening begins after 6 pm and morning is before noon, but that is not the proper definition of the terms in the Bible. Evening in the days of Moses began as the sun began its descent at noon; therefore, evening in the Bible is equal to our afternoon. Likewise, morning in the days of Moses ended at noon. It therefore should be understood that from the beginning of evening until the end of morning, the Lampstand would be attended by Aaron and his sons and the lamp would burn continuously. Also, the changing of the priest, (which has not been discussed yet in the Scripture) will occur at noon; therefore, each priest would be responsible for his 24-hour duty from evening until morning.

In Exodus 30:8 we will learn that at twilight, meaning the setting of the sun before dark, Aaron and his sons were to trim the wicks in the Lampstand. The purpose of trimming the wicks which drew the oil from the reservoir was to allow the flame to burn cleanly, evenly and brightly without any hotspots being formed.

The Priests Identified

Exodus 28:1 **"Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me-- Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.**

We must not forget that Moses was a Levite. For some reason, the LORD passed by Moses' line and directed the priesthood through Aaron and his descendants alone. But the descendants of Aaron did not include all the males in the line of Levi present in the Sinai camp. We often speak of the priests being from the line of Levi and that the Levites were the priests, but that is not completely true. This conclusion must cause us to pause and address the question, “How many descendants of Levi were alive at the time of the exodus?” As seen in the chart to the right, in the five generations not many male descendants of Levi were recorded by name in the Scripture at the time of the exodus (none of the children of Jahath, Zimmah, Shemei I, Izhar, Hebron, Mishael,

	Gershom	Libni	Jahath	Zimmah
		Shemei I		
	Kohath	Izhar		
		Hebron		
		Amram	Aaron	Nadab
				Abihu
				Eleazar
				Ithamar
Levi			Moses	Gershom
				Eliezer
		Uzziel	Mishael	
			Elzaphan	
			Zithni	
	Merari	Mahli	Libni	Shemei II
		Mushi		

Elzaphan, Zithni, Mahli, Libni, Shemei II and Mushi were recorded in Scripture). Nevertheless, the descendants of Aaron were chosen to be the priestly line. This decision excluded all the sons of Gersham, Kohath and Merari who were not direct sons of Aaron. They were still of the tribe of Levi and they would still be set apart and handled differently from the general instruction given to the other 11 tribes. To summarize some of the differences, all the Levites would be restricted from owning land in the Promised Land; their welfare would be provided by gifts and offerings to the Tabernacle passed on to the priestly line and their relatives. The houses and the land they lived on would be donated from families of the other 11 tribes, but the houses and land were loaned only for a time and not permanent gifts. They would have to work the land, grow crops, raise cattle, herd sheep, spin wool, weave cloth, dig wells and do everything else that it took to survive, yet none of it actually belonged to them; it was all provided by the people for their use without obligation of payment of any kind.

The members of the tribe of Levi who were not specifically from the priestly line of Aaron were set apart from all the other tribes for one main purpose - to provide suitable wives for the male descendants of Aaron who would be the priests. Tribes were required, in general, to marry within their tribes; however, soon, the LORD would give restrictions on marriage compatibility in the LORD's Levitical Law and those laws would limit the ability of any male descendant of Aaron to marry a woman from the Aaronic line. But with the whole tribe of Levi set apart for holiness, even though only a small subset could be priests, marriages could take place totally within the Levitical Law requirements. Eventually, all the descendants of Levi at some point in the forthcoming generations would be blessed by having a daughter marry into the priestly line.