

• *The outside courtyard*

1. Instruction about the altar

• *Wooden frame*

• *Copper walls*

• *Filled with earth or stones*

• *Utensils for sacrifices*

• *Easily transported but not to be touched*

• *God can only be approached by the offering of a sacrifice for sins*

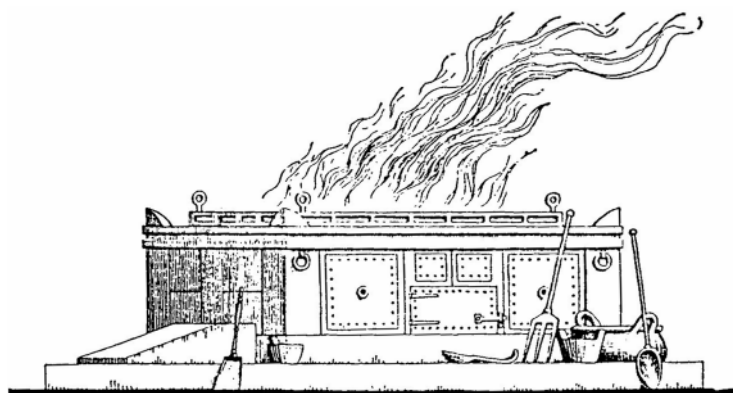
2. Instruction about the tabernacle courtyard

• *Fences of linen cloth*

We have had described for us, the ark for the holy of holies^{□1}, the table^{□2} and the lampstand^{□3} for the holy place. The ‘**altar of incense**’ which was the third item in the holy place is not yet mentioned.

The description now moves to the outside courtyard where two items were to be found: the altar and the laver.

1. **God’s instruction to Moses now focuses on the altar.** The altar was to be made of wood, says Exodus 27:1. Probably the wood was a wooden frame which gave the basic shape. The altar had ‘horns’ or ‘projections’ on its corners^{□1}. But it had no top to it. Then the walls of the altar were covered with bronze or (more likely, since bronze would melt) with copper. Earth or stones would be used to fill the inside of the hollow altar. Exodus 20:24–26 said the altar should be made of earth or stone.



The altar

Other utensils would be needed for the regular sacrifices: pots, shovels, bowls, large forks, small fire-stoves^{□1}. Verses 4–5 describe some kind of grating. It was probably inside the altar to be a grill for the sacrifices; the ashes would fall through the grill.

It is likely that the wooden frame inside the bronze or copper casing would be turned to ashes as soon as the altar was used. This would not matter. It was only a temporary frame around which to build the copper casing. The altar had to be light enough to be carried as Israel travelled into Canaan. So it had to be hollow. Verses 6–8 deal with the carrying of the altar. Like other large pieces of tabernacle furniture, it was not touched as it was carried. It had poles which made it unnecessary to touch it^{□1}. Its interior was hollow which made it relatively easy to carry^{□2}.

The altar stands for the need of sacrifice if God is to be approached. It said to every Israelite that God could not be approached except via sacrifice. The altar was just inside the court. The very first thing that had to be done if God were to be approached at all was that sacrifice had to be offered. It said in symbolism that no one was ready to step within the tabernacle in which God’s presence could be experienced, unless he came via a sacrifice for sins.

2. **God’s instruction next focuses on the tabernacle courtyard.** The south fence of one hundred cubits (nearly 50 metres) should be made of linen cloth^{□1} held by twenty columns on twenty bronze pedestals^{□2}. The north fence would be similar^{□3}. The length of the west side would be half the size^{□4}. The east side would be the entrance. It would be fifteen cubits of fence on one side, an entrance of twenty cubits with a screen across it, and fifteen cubits for the rest of the fence the other side^{□5}. The fittings for the fence would be made of silver^{□6}. According to 27:18, the total area would be a hundred by fifty cubits (just under 50 by 25 metres) and the fence

□1 25:10-22
□2 25:23-38
□3 25:31-40

□1 27:2a

□1 27:3

□1 27:6-7
□2 27:8

□1 27:9
□2 27:10
□3 27:11

□4 27:12

□5 27:13-16
□6 27:17

• *Silver and copper fittings*

• *The courtyard speaks of this world*

3. Instruction about the keeping of the light

• *Seven-branched lampstand perpetually burning*

• *Responsibility of Aaron and the high priests*

• *Oil represents God's provision*

• *Oil represents the Holy Spirit*

• *Similarly Jesus and his people give out a steady light*

would be five cubits high (about 2.3 metres). Smaller fittings would be made of bronze or some kind of copper-like metal⁷.

The courtyard speaks of this world. If it's true that the tent itself spoke of heaven, then the courtyard spoke of what is on earth. There was an area which was marked off from the world outside and yet was not within the tabernacle itself. The great altar was there. Jesus died in the 'outer courtyard' of this world He did not die in heaven! He died visibly, publicly, in a place where everyone could see Him. The courtyard reminds us that there is a place **outside** close fellowship with God, but where cleansing and atonement are available. 'A day in your courts', said David 'is better than a thousand elsewhere'¹.

3. **The main instructions concerning the building of the tabernacle ends at Exodus 27:19.** God's instruction next deals with the command for **the keeping of the light**. Once the tabernacle is built it will be necessary to have the seven-branched lampstand perpetually burning. The oil for it must be the brightest and best that is available, pure olive oil made by hand-pounding olives¹. Aaron and the later generations of high-priests must see that the lampstand stays alight. It must be placed in the holy place in front of the veil².

This is the first piece of ritual that is mentioned among the many regulations concerning sacrifices and special ceremonies of the tabernacle. These two verses make a kind of bridge between the sections dealing with the tabernacle structure and the sections dealing with the priests. The command concerning the light is not mentioned again in Exodus (although it has a parallel in Leviticus 24:1-3).

If the lampstand represented the light of God which comes as the result of fellowship with God, then the oil within the lamps reminds us that the lamps shine only because of God's provision. Lamps do not shine because of their own resources. They need something put into them to cause their light to shine. Such symbolism is not spelled out in the tabernacle narratives themselves. The structure simply gives us a picture of a place for table-fellowship, and we note that it is also a place of God-given illumination. Yet even in the Old Testament the 'oil' is interpreted more fully, and is related to the Holy Spirit¹, and the New Testament uses the idea of 'anointing oil' in describing the powerful working of the Holy Spirit. We may take it then that Jesus becomes 'the light' to His people, through the presence of the Holy Spirit in His life. What is true of Him becomes true of us.

The light burns continuously; Jesus and His people give out steady light. Aaron the high-priest had to attend to the light. Similarly it is Jesus who trims our life that we may burn brighter.

⁷ 27:19

¹ Psalm 84:10

¹ 27:20

² 27:21

¹ see Zechariah 4:1-6



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