

Altar & The Tabernacle (Exodus 25 - 30)

Review:

Altar -- A place (especially a raised platform) where sacrifices are made. Originates from the Latin word "altare" meaning "high place" ("Alt" means "high" e.g. altitude).

**Altar -- mizbeh (Hebrew meaning "place of slaughter or sacrifice")
bomos (Greek meaning "to approach")**

Purposes: Memorial, Possession, Call on Name of The Lord

The first recorded altars were lay altars - - they were not built by nor worshipped at by a special priest but by individuals who just wanted to honor God, thank Him, show their confidence in Him, and remember Him and what He promised for themselves and subsequent generations. But, eventually God established the priesthood...

Two significant altars:

1) The Altar of Burnt Offering (Also called the Brazen Altar or Bronze Altar)

Symbolized the Need for a Sacrifice for Sin (27:1-8; 38:1-7)

This altar was a large box (L= 7 ½ ft, W= 7 ½ ft, H= 4 ½ ft) and it was the largest piece of furniture in the Tabernacle. Made of acacia wood and overlaid with bronze, its center was hollow except for a grating; there the coals would be placed to burn the sacrifices. (Altar of Burnt Offering - Lev. 4:7, 10, 18) The inside of the box probably was lined with earth when the fire was burning (to keep the box itself from igniting); workers could remove the earth for easy transport when necessary. Craftsmen created bronze implements for removing the ashes of a sacrifice (shovels, basins, forks, firepans - 27:3)

Four horns adorned the altar, one on each corner; The horns were used to tie up and suspend the sacrifice of the fire (27:2). The horns themselves would be smeared with the blood of the sacrifice (Ex. 29:12; Lev. 8:15; 9:9; 16:18) to sanctify it to receive the sacrifice. The altar was fitted with rings through which poles, also of wood covered with bronze, could be installed to facilitate carrying the altar.

The altar was the first object a worshipper would see upon entering the court; it was a powerful reminder that sin separates one from God and that sin means death. It spoke of the absolute necessity for atonement if one were to approach the Lord. "The slaughter of animals on this altar was a very vivid reminder to Israel that sin indeed requires a high price. It was not pleasant to see an animal slaughtered and burned, yet sin is ugly and the sacrifice here, as well as at Calvary, should be a vivid reminder to all of the hideousness of sin and its price.**

(Note: The Altar of Burnt Offering was tall enough (7 ½ ft.) that the priest would have appreciated having a ladder in order to reach the top. Nevertheless, a mound of earth was probably used -- Exodus 20: 22-26 / Proper Use of Altars)

2) The Altar of Incense: Symbol of Prayer and Intercession (30:1 -10; 37:25 - 29)

This is the third piece of furniture in the Holy Place (Golden Lampstand & Table of Showbread). Like the other pieces, the altar was made of acacia wood and overlaid with gold. It was 1 ½ ft long, 1 ½ ft wide, and 3 ft tall. Apparently, this was a smaller version, in gold, of the bronze altar in the court, complete with the horns on each corner. Like the other items, it was fitted with rings and supplied with poles to be inserted through the rings when the item was being transported. The altar of incense stood on the west side of the Holy Place just in front of the Veil, and just in front of the Mercy Seat (30:6).

As with the lamps so with the incense, the priest was to service the altar every day (30:7) and this practice was to be perpetual (30:8). No other incense (strange incense 30:34-38) and no other offering was to be placed on this altar except the atonement blood on the Day of Atonement (30:9,10). The solemn pronouncement “It is most holy to the Lord (30:10)” was meant to reiterate the care and reverence the nation was to maintain in worship and devotion to God. This altar was symbolic of the nation’s prayers and praise; like this pleasing incense, the prayers of the people were to ascend continually to a glorious and gracious Lord God (Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4)**

The Tabernacle

- 1) Instituted the graduation of man from the physical to the spiritual**
- 2) The Tabernacle was “mobile”...symbolic of “transporting” worship wherever we go**
- 3) Illuminates the truth that one can never approach God vainly, disorderly, nor wrecklessly (Examples: Abel & Cain and Aaron’s sons Nadab & Abihu)**

Altar Examples

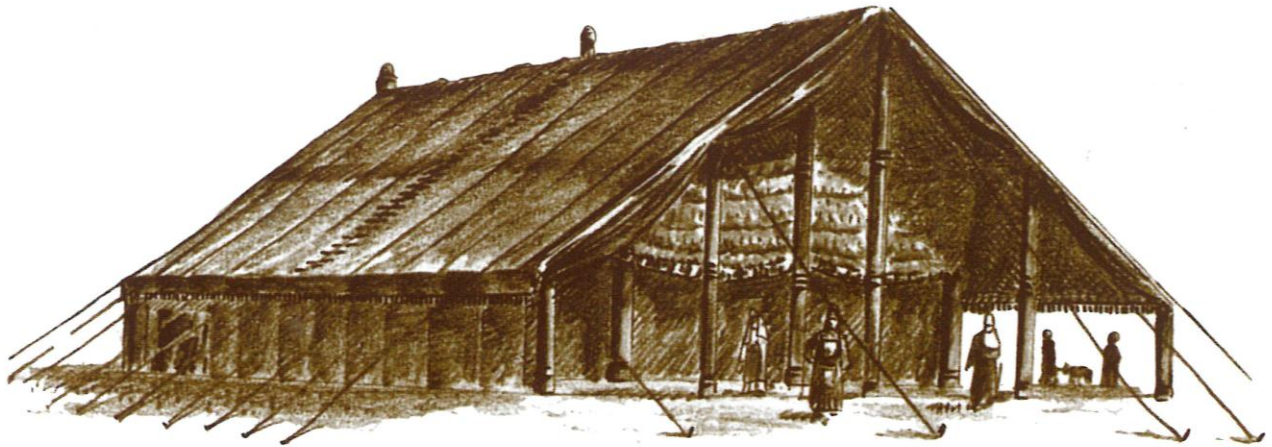
ALTAR



Israelite altar, after repairs, showing its four horns



Replica of the Altar of Incense



Artist's impression of the possible appearance of the tabernacle. The Bible does not specify whether the tent had a flat roof or a pitched tent-like roof.

whom it pointed in detail, that they might be saved by faith.

20. The Decalogue

1-12. The first table, duties to God.

These guarded His unity and spirituality against idolatry, His holiness against profanity, and His worship on the seventh day against secularism.

13-17. The second table, duties to men. 'Honor your father and your mother' stands as the first command attended by a specific promise (20:12; Eph 6:2). 'You shall not murder,' 13, decrees the sanctity of life against murder. 'You shall not commit adultery,' 14, protects marriage and the home. 'You shall not steal,' 15, maintains the right of property against plunder. 'You shall not give false testimony,' 16, upholds the sanctity of character against slander. 'You shall not covet,' 17, protects the heart against wrong desires.

18-21. Israel asks for a mediator.

Although God had called Israel to be a kingdom of priests (19:6), Israel fearfully asks Moses to be a mediator on their behalf.

20:22-23:33. The book of the covenant. So called in 24:7, this section outlines in greater detail the stipulations of God's covenant with Israel.

21-24. The social ordinances

21:1-36. Rights of persons. Laws were given concerning the regulations of slavery, 1-11; wrongs done to a fellowman, 12-27; injuries resulting from carelessness or neglect, 28-36.

22:1-15. Rights of property. Laws were given dealing with theft, 1-6, and dishonesty, 7-15.

22:16-23:19. Requirements of

personal integrity. Proper conduct, 22:16-31, was set forth; administration of common justice, 23:19, and observance of the festal seasons, 10-19.

23:20-33. Promise and prospect.

Assurance of the divine presence with Israel, 20-23, was given and a blessed future predicted, if the people remained loyal to the Lord, 24-33. These injunctions of the book of the covenant were for the social and religious instruction of Israel.

24:18-31:18. Moses on the top of the mountain. The forty days and forty nights that Moses remained on the mountain was significant in its duration paralleling the length of Elijah's pilgrimage back to Mt. Horeb and Jesus' time of testing (also in the wilderness).

24:1-17. Acceptance of the legal covenant and worship. Again the voluntary acceptance of the law by Israel was stressed (cf. 19:78). The covenant was ratified.

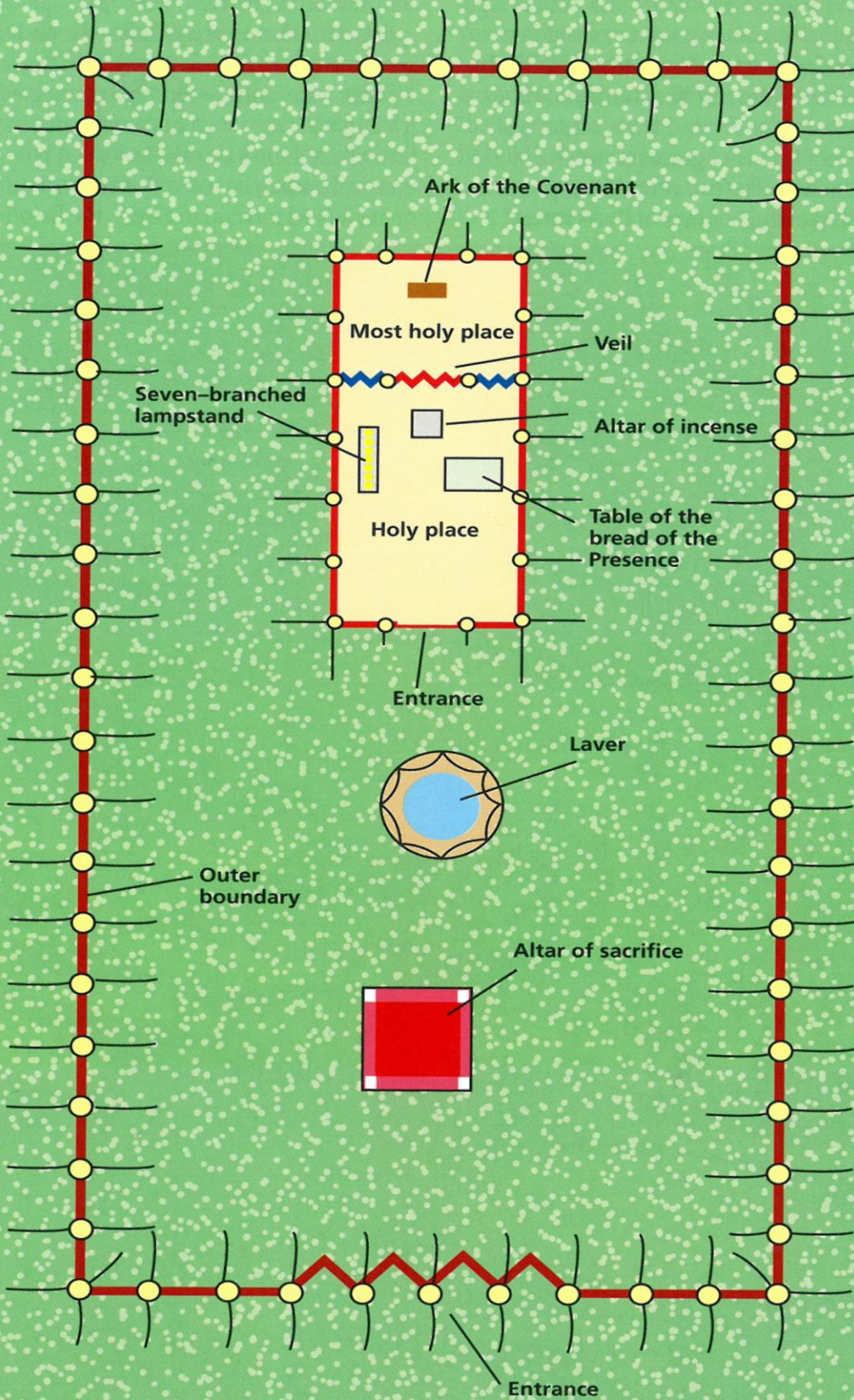
25. The tabernacle: ark, table, candlestick

1-9. The materials were supplied by the people's offering, including three metals, coloured fabrics, animal skins, wood, oil and

Archaeological light

Discoveries of Near Eastern treaty texts have done much to explain the form and structure of God's covenant with Israel as recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. Mendenhall and Kline have observed a structural similarity between the Sinai covenant and Hittite suzerainty treaties; the correspondences argue for the authenticity of God's revelation to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Plan of the tabernacle



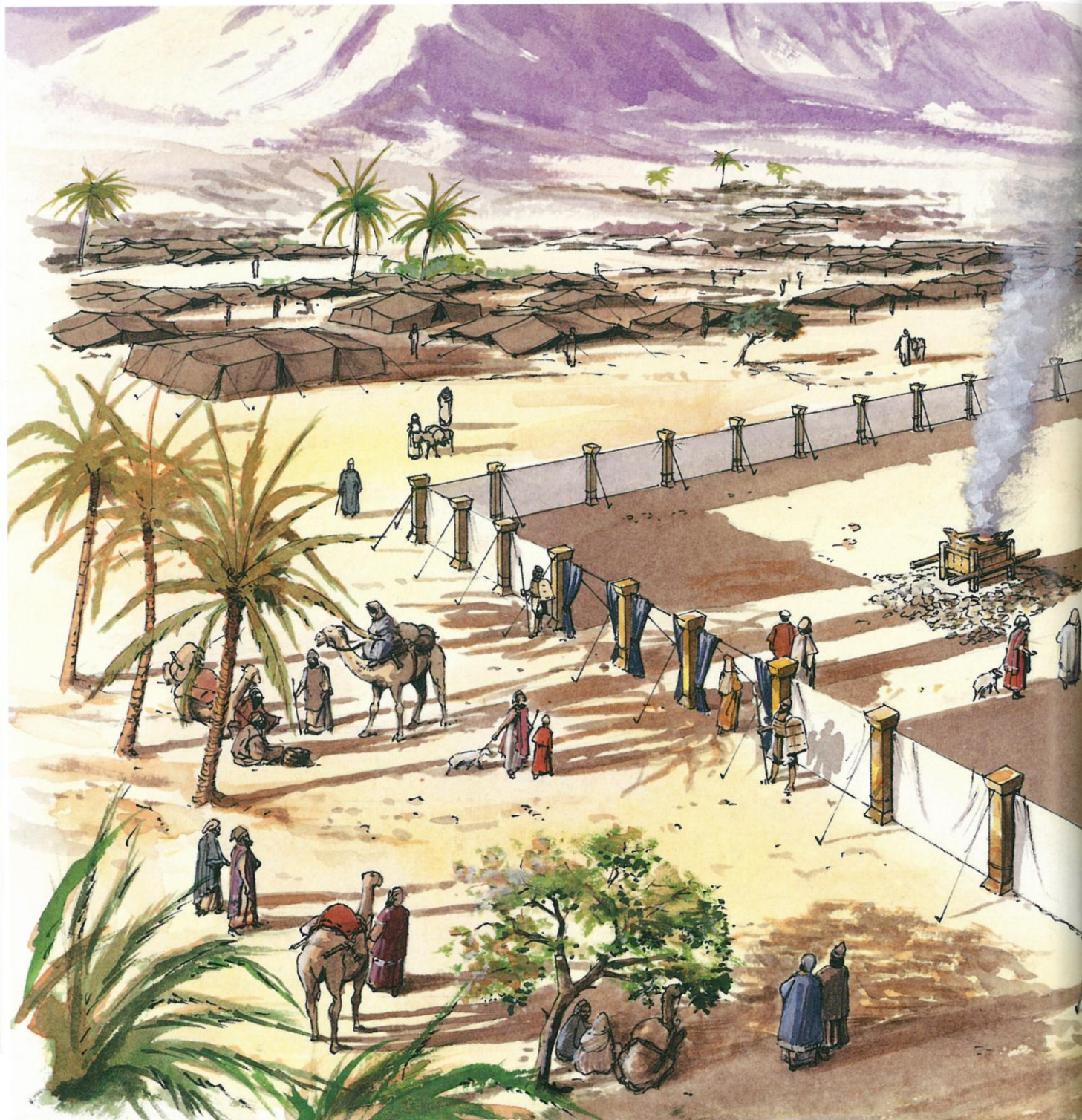
Artist's impression of the tabernacle set up near Mount Sinai, surrounded by the tents of the Hebrews. Notice the cloud of the Shekinah, symbolizing God's presence, over the Holy of Holies and the sacrifice on the altar.

precious stones. All was by divine direction, 9.

10-22. The ark. This box, 3 ³/₄ feet long, 2 ¹/₄ feet wide and 2 ¹/₄ feet high, was made of acacia wood overlaid with pure gold. It held a pot of manna, the Ten Commandments and later Aaron's rod that budded. The mercy seat was the gold lid on top of the ark, illustrating how the divine throne is transformed from a throne of judgment to a throne of grace by atoning blood sprinkled upon it. The two cherubim represented guardianship of the holiness of God's throne,

above which was enthroned the Shekinah glory presence of the Lord. The ark was the core of the tabernacle symbolism, God working outward in His outreach to man.

23-30. The table of shewbread. Made of acacia wood, it was 3 feet long, 2 ¹/₄ feet high and 1 ¹/₂ feet wide, and overlaid with pure gold. Upon it was placed the bread of the Presence made of fine wheat flour, baked in 12 loaves, renewed every sabbath to be eaten by the priests only. This bread looked forward to Christ, the Bread of life,



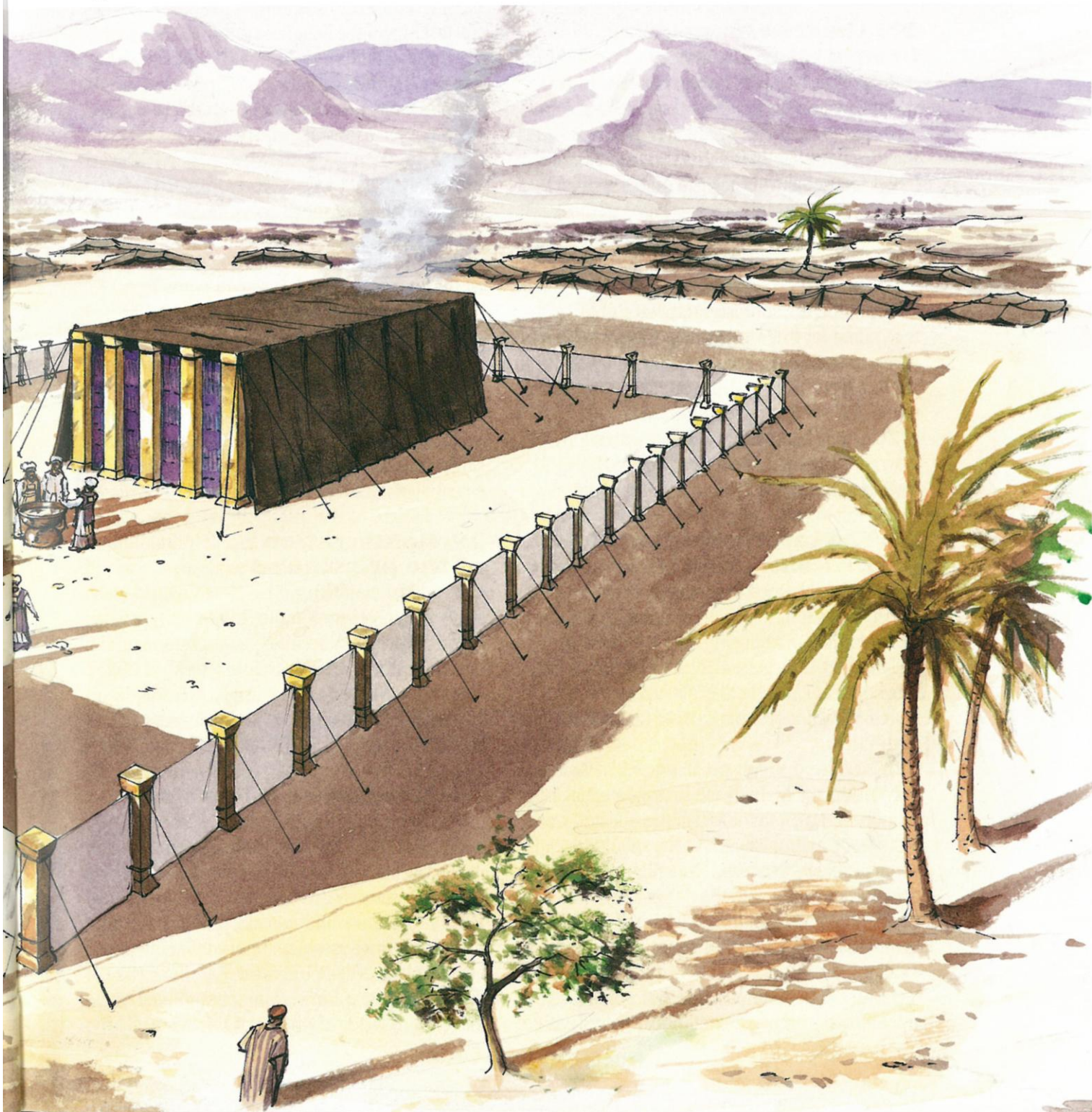
nourisher of the believer as a priest (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6; Jn 6:33-58).

31-40. The golden candlestick. This was of pure gold, seven-branched; a type of Christ our Light, shining in the plenitude of the Spirit, natural light being shut out of the tabernacle. Some link this lamp stand with the lamp stands of Rev 1:12-16, from the center of which shined the Son. The representation on the triumphal arch of Titus may give an accurate notion of its appearance.

26. The tabernacle: its general construction

1-6. The linen curtains. Ten in all, they were white linen with blue, purple and scarlet yarn embroidered into the shape of cherubim.

7-37. The tabernacle coverings, boards, veil and outer screen. The veil of the tabernacle separated the holy place from the holy of holies, the inner sanctuary where the ark of the covenant was located. Josephus reported that the veil was four inches thick and that the



Acacia tree

embroidered design had mystical significance. To the believer, the veil represents separation from the presence of God, a separation that was terminated when Christ was crucified, at which time the veil was 'torn in two from top to bottom' (Mt 27:51). Though the OT high priest could only go behind the veil once a year, Christ as our High Priest (Heb 9:11-12) provided access to the presence of God to all who would enter 'by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body' (Heb 10:20).

27. The tabernacle: bronze altar, court

1-8. The brazen (bronze) altar. This was the great altar for general sacrifice of animals, 7^{1/2} feet square, 4^{1/2} feet high, located at the threshold, signifying that the shedding of blood (atonement) is basic to man's approach to God. It is typical of the cross (death) of Christ, our whole burnt offering, who offered Himself without spot to God (Heb 9:14).

9-19. The court. The curtains of fine linen surrounding the court suggest that righteousness is required for true worship since they shut out all who will not enter by the gate. The gate, 16 (cf. Jn 10:9), suggests Christ. He is our access to God by virtue of His redemptive work.

20-21. The oil for light. The fine olive oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:34; Heb 1:9). In Christ the oil-fed light constantly burns.

28. The tabernacle priesthood

1-5. Priesthood in Aaron and his sons. Aaron, the high priest (Heb. 'great priest'), typifies Christ, who exercises His office after the Aaronic *pattern* (Heb 9), but being after the *order* of Melchizedek is an eternal, deathless High Priest. The holy garments for 'dignity and honor,' 2, represent the glory and beauty of Christ as our High Priest.

6-14. The ephod was an apronlike vestment worn under the high priest's breastplate, having shoulder straps, an embroidered girdle and worn over a robe. On top of each of the shoulder straps an onyx stone was encased in a filigree setting of gold and engraved with the names of six tribes of Israel. Christ bears His own on His shoulder (strength) by virtue of His present high priestly intercession.

15-29. The breastplate was gorgeously embellished with precious stones engraved with

the names of Israel's tribes. It illustrates Christ bearing the names of His own upon His heart in God's presence as Aaron did when he went into the holy place, 29.

30. Urim and Thummim. The 'lights and perfections' were closely associated with the breastplate of judgment. They suggest the guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit, whether they were precious stones or oracular emblems.

31-35. Robe of the ephod. The bells on the hem of the robe spoke of God's acceptance of the priestly sacrifice. As long as the people heard the tinkling of the bells they knew that the high priest was still alive in the holy of holies and that God was satisfied with their atoning sacrifice, 35. In contrast, Christ, the better High Priest, '*always lives* to intercede for them' (Heb 7:25).

36-38. The gold headplate was inscribed with 'Holy to the Lord', a reminder of the unsullied purity of the priestly ministry of Christ (Heb 7:26).

39-43. Garments of the regular priests. The ordinary vestments of the high priest and the regular priests, over which the special high priestly regalia was placed, indicate that 'dignity and honor' that characterized Aaron (Christ) also characterized his sons (believer priests in this age). The linen trousers to cover their naked flesh, 42, portray the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer; the absolute essential of access to God as a priest.

29. Consecration of the priesthood

1-4. The washing. This cleansing in water symbolizes regeneration (Jn 3:5; Tit 3:5), in which Aaron participated, because he was a sinner and needed it. Our Lord as the spotless Lamb of God (Heb 7:26-28), who did not need it, nevertheless yielded to John's baptism at Jordan to identify Himself with sinners and fulfill the Aaronic pattern (Mt 3:13-17).

5-25. The clothing and anointing. Clothed with his splendid garments, 5-6, and anointed, 7, symbolic of Christ's enduement with the Spirit (Mt 3:16; Acts 10:38), Aaron alone, it is to be noted, was anointed *before* the blood was shed (cf. 21). The consecration of the priests required various offerings in which the shedding of animal blood took place, 8-25. This sets Aaron off as a striking picture of Christ, who was anointed with the Spirit by virtue of what He was in Himself in

Archaeological light

Comparisons have been made between the case law of the Mosaic covenant and earlier codes such as the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1700 B.C.), the Lipit-Ishtar Code (c. 1875 B.C.) and the Ur Nammu Code (2050 B.C.). Sufficient similarity exists to affirm the antiquity of the Mosaic covenant – and yet even more striking differences attest to its uniqueness as a divine revelation.

His deity and sinless humanity, not by virtue of redemption, as is the case of all believers.

26-46. Special food for priests. This was fitting for those, 26-37, who represented the people before God in sacrifice and worship, 38-46.

30. The altar of incense and the worshipers

1-10. The altar of incense was of acacia wood overlaid with gold, 1½ feet square, 3 feet high. Equipped with inseparable horns and staves for transporting it, it was placed in the holy place in front of the veil. On it Aaron was to offer incense twice daily, 7-8. The incense fittingly symbolizes prayer, which like ascending sweet aromas, rises acceptably to heaven (Rev 5:8; 8:3). The incense altar pictures Christ as the believer's intercessor (Jn 17:1-26; Heb 7:25), through whom the believer's prayer and praise rise up to God (Heb 13:15). No 'other incense,' 9, i.e., improperly compounded (cf. 30:34-38), was to be used. Cf. 'unauthorized fire' of Lev 10:1-3, which refers to fire kindled in some manner other than that divinely prescribed, and Jn 1:9). True worshipers must also be continually cleansed from daily defilement.

23-33. The anointing oil, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The redeemed, those daily cleansed, and those empowered by the Spirit alone can worship God effectively (Jn 4:23; Eph 2:18; 5:18-19) in the beauty and fragrance of holiness.

34-38. The incense. The ingredients are also given, as in the case of the anointing oil. Only these redeemed, 11-16; cleansed, 7-21; and anointed, 34-38, can truly worship God with genuine prayer, praise and thanksgiving, 34-38, symbolized by the incense, which in turn was to be uniquely compounded and reserved for God's adoration alone, 37. To imitate it was a crime punishable by death, showing that worship must be truly spiritual (Jn 4:23-24).

31. The workmen and the sabbath

1-11. The call of the workmen. Bezaleel ('in the shadow of God') and Aholiab ('tent of [my] Father') were filled with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, 2-3, to execute all the skilled labor necessary.

12-17. The sabbath law restated. Cf. 16:23-29 for the first institution of the day of rest to be kept by Israel, in connection with the giving of the manna. Shortly afterward it was re-enacted in the fourth commandment (20:8-11), linking it with the creation rest of God (Gen 2:2). The sabbath is accordingly a Jewish institution, connected with the legal or Mosaic covenant, and its infraction punishable by death. Sunday is not a sabbath, but the first day of the week, and belongs to the new age of grace which followed the death and resurrection of Christ. Legalistic Sabbath keeping is to go back to the age previous to the rent veil (Mt 27:51).

18. Moses receives the tables of stone (cf. 32:16). It is significant that the tablets were written by 'the finger of God' rather than being entrusted to a human scribe. The extraordinary action testifies to the importance of God's law.

32. The broken covenant

1-14. The golden calf. The legal covenant, so glibly accepted, was here shamefully violated, showing the utter inability of the people to keep it in their own strength. Shortly after the people exclaimed that they would make no idols and worship no other gods, they fashioned a calf that either represented a return to the bull worship of Egypt (Apis), or the Canaanite practice of making a footstool or throne for God (Baal is often pictured on the back of a bull). Only the intercession of Moses rescued them from wholesale destruction, 11-14.

15-35. The broken tablets. A scene of terrible apostasy and debauchery met Moses, the man of God, coming down from the mountain of God with the law of God in his hands. The whole scene showed the inability of the law, itself good, to make men good. Depraved man is never saved by law-keeping, but by faith. Justification by faith is the way of salvation in every age. The law was a schoolmaster to reveal man's sin and his need of God's grace and redemption. Moses called for those who were on the Lord's side, and the Levites

THE TABERNACLE TENT

The entire tent was 45 feet (13.7 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 Most Holy Place 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 high priest could enter only once a year, on the Day of Atonement (see note on Heb. 9:7).

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

The table for the bread of the Presence (Ex. 25:23–30)

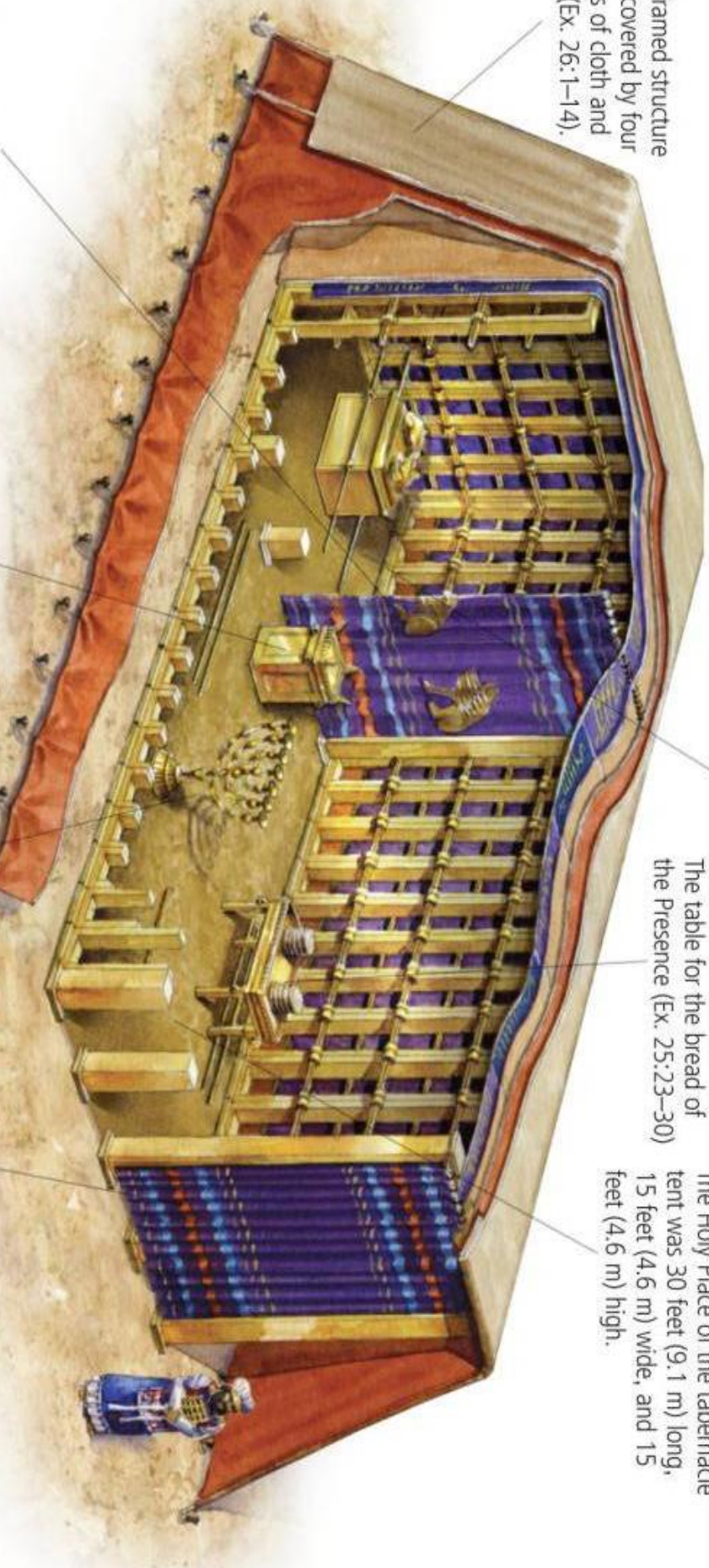
The Holy Place of the tabernacle tent was 30 feet (9.1 m) long, 15 feet (4.6 m) wide, and 15 feet (4.6 m) high.

The veil separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place was made from blue, purple, and scarlet dyed yarns woven with fine twined linen and embroidered with cherubim (Ex. 26:31–33). It hung on four golden pillars.

The altar of incense (Ex. 30:1–5; 37:25–29)

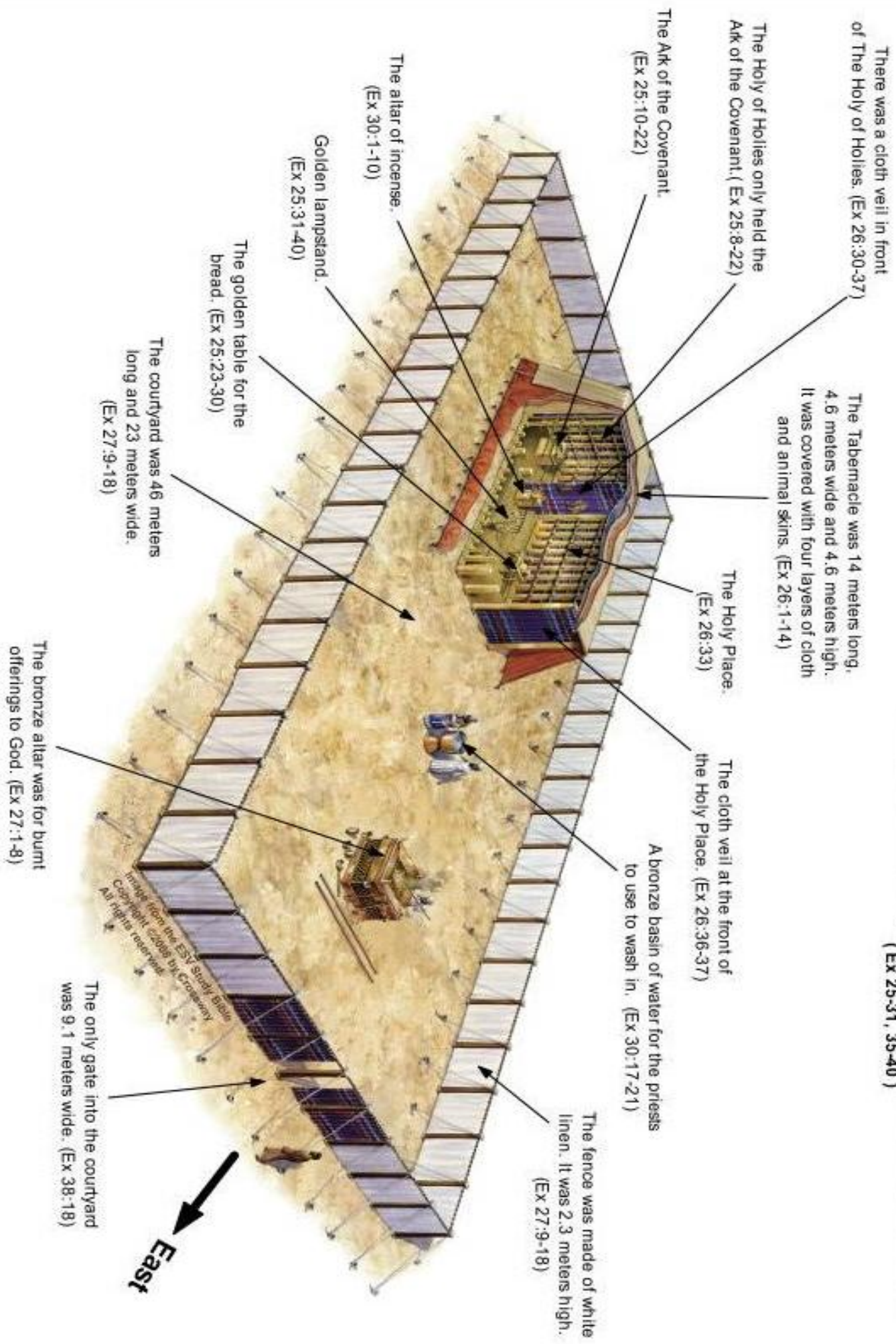
The golden lampstand (Ex. 25:31–40; 37:17–24)

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



The Tabernacle In The Wilderness

God commanded Moses to build the Tabernacle and a courtyard for it. It was made like a tent so that it could be taken apart and carried. This view is as if the Tabernacle were cut open and part of it removed so we can look inside. (Ex 25-31, 35-40)



INSIDE THE TEMPLE

(Cutaway view)

1. Holy of Holies
2. Ark
3. Veil
4. Altar of Incense
5. Lampstand (Menorah)
6. Holy Place
7. Table of Shewbread
8. Outer Veil

Pillar of
Smoke

The
Temple

Pillar

Court of the
Tabernacle

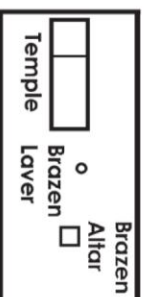
Brazen
Laver

Slaughter
Tables

Brazen
Altar

Size comparison
(approximate):

American
Football Field



Court of the
Tabernacle

Curtain
enclosure

Entrance
Curtain

TEMPLE COVERINGS AND CURTAINS

9. Outer covering of badger skins
10. Covering of Ram's skin dyed red
11. Curtain of goat's hair
12. Curtain of fine linen

The Tabernacle

This portable temple was built in the wilderness by the Israelites circa 1450 BC after they were freed from Egyptian slavery. The Tabernacle was the first temple dedicated to God and the first resting place of the Ark of the Covenant. It served as a place of worship and sacrifices during the Israelites' 40 years in the desert while conquering the land of Canaan.

The Structure and Dimensions of the Tabernacle

