Exodus Chapter Thirty Five

Overview of Exodus Chapters 35-40

A large portion of material that appears in Exodus 35-40 repeats either verbatim or almost verbatim the material that is found in Exodus 25-31. This repetition is tedious to the human mind here in the twenty-first century. In our day and age, people despise repetition. The modern reader would view Exodus 35-40 and say “why not simply tell us the reader that Moses and the Israelites did all the Lord commanded them to do to construct and furnish the tabernacle?” However, there is a definite purpose for such repetition.

The repetition that appears in these chapters corresponds to the rules of an honored literary genre, which occurs elsewhere in the ancient Near East. The ancient extrabiblical command-fulfillment accounts containing extensive repetition forced the reader to agree that a set of important instructions was conscientiously executed to the letter. The command-fulfillment repetition is a way of emphasizing the importance of what is commanded and the precision with which it is obeyed. Therefore, the repetition is so that the reader knows for certain that the Israelites conscientiously obeyed the Lord’s commands which appear in Exodus 25-31. They conscientiously obeyed the Lord’s commands in these chapters.

Seven times in each of the last two chapters the words “as the LORD commanded Moses” (or “as the LORD commanded him”) occur (39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31; 40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32). Moses was indeed a faithful servant (Num. 12:7; Heb. 3:5).¹

The repetition of chapters 35-40 expresses the fact that Moses and the Israelites conscientiously obeyed all the Lord commanded them to do in chapters 25-31. This is significant because it demonstrates that the Israelites had indeed repented of their idolatry which is recorded in Exodus 32. The command-fulfillment pattern is employed mainly with regards to situations where what has been commanded can be easily verified as to whether or not a set of commands has been executed.

There is another reason for the extensive repetition in chapters 35-40, namely that it was both instructive and regulatory for Aaron and his sons in that it would remind them of their responsibilities and keep them from deviating from the manner in which the Lord prescribed by the Israelites to worship Him. Aaron and his sons, who were the priests as well as the Levitical priests who appear later were responsible in making sure the Israelites community worshipped the Lord according to the regulations He set. So the command-fulfillment pattern served to legitimize their service in representing the Lord before the Israelites and vice versa.

The extensive repetition found in chapters 35-40 serve still another purpose in that it served as a witness again the Israelites. The Israelites were inclined to fall into the sin of idolatry as expressed later on in their history (cf. 1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10; Jeremiah 2:20; 3:6; Ezekiel 6:13; 20:28). Like their pagan neighbors, the Israelites committed idolatry. The meticulous clarity of the tabernacle instructions as expressed by the repetition inherent in the command-fulfillment structure of chapters 35-40 would serve as a witness against the Israelites because they could not say that they did not understand the Lord’s instructions.

Though Exodus 35-40 contains much of the same material which appears in Exodus 25-31, the former does not present this material in the same order as the latter. Exodus 25-31 begins with the Lord calling for an offering to be taken among the Israelites in order to furnish the materials to build the tabernacle. This is followed by a description of the articles for the tabernacle in the order of their importance and holiness. Thus, these chapters move from the most sacred object in the tabernacle, the Ark to the least sacred, the courtyard perimeter. However, in Exodus 35-40, the objects are described in the order they were actually constructed by the Israelites.

It must be noted that Exodus 35-40 repeats much of the instructions in Exodus 25-31, there are places where something stated in detail in the latter is more precisely summarized in the former. Whereas in some places something stated in Exodus 25-31 is expanded upon in Exodus 35-40. Also, society in the ancient Near East was an oral society unlike our society in the twenty-first century which is very visual. Thus, we find in Exodus 35-40 some differences occur with Exodus 25-31 in the way a command is worded and the way the fulfillment is worded. This would help keep the listener aware of which section of the literary work he or she was listening to. If there is a long stretch where everything is repeated verbatim, the listener could be confused. Thus slight changes are essential to help the listener. The fulfillment section in chapters 35-40 also serves to complement chapters 25-31 in that it reinforces and builds upon what has already been stated in the latter.

The following is an outline of Exodus chapter 35: (I) Reiteration of the Sabbath Observance Command (1-3), (II) Reiteration of the Offering Command (4-9) (III) Reiteration of Call for Skilled Workers (10-19) (IV) Israelites Provide Tabernacle Materials (20-29) (V) Moses Appoints and Endorses Bezalel and Oholiab (30-35).

Exodus 35:1-3: Reiteration of Sabbath Observance Command

Exodus 35:1 Then Moses assembled all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and said to them, “These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do: 2 “For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall
have a holy day, a sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. 3 You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the sabbath day.”

In Exodus 35:1-3, Moses reiterates with the Israelites the Sabbath observance command, which appeared in Exodus 31:12-17. The mention in the former is the fourth time that we have the Lord instructing Israel to observe the Sabbath. It was first mentioned in connection with the collection of manna in Exodus 16:21-26. Then, the fourth of the Ten Commandments was the observance of the Sabbath (20:8-11). It was mentioned in Exodus 23:12 in connection with the Sabbath rests for the land. Exodus 23:12 echoes Exodus 20:8-11.

“Sabbath” is the noun šāb-bāt (ניְּֽשַׁבָּת) (shab-bawth), which means “rest period” referring to the seventh day of the week which is called “Saturday.” Genesis 2:2-3 teaches that God rested or ceased from His creative and restorative activity on the seventh day. The Hebrew words for “seventh” and “rested” are similar.

Now, Exodus 20:8-11 makes clear that the observance of the Sabbath is connected to the fact that God Himself rested on the seventh day after six days of work (Genesis 2:2-3). The Sabbath is thus an invitation to rejoice in God’s creation and to acknowledge that He is sovereign. Deuteronomy 5:15 gives another reason for observing the Sabbath. This verse connects the Sabbath with Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Therefore, every Sabbath the Israelites were to bring into remembrance that the Lord delivered them from Egyptian bondage by means of His omnipotence. Exodus 20:10, Deuteronomy 5:14-15 and Exodus 23:12 teach that the Sabbath was for the benefit of both man and animal in Israel.

In Exodus 31:13, the Lord commands Moses to tell the Israelites that they must keep His Sabbaths, which refers not only to observing the seventh day as a period of rest to worship the Lord but also involves observing the laws concerning the sabbath rest for the land which is mentioned in Exodus 23:10-13. It is also used in connection with the gathering of manna which is mentioned in Exodus 16:21-26.

The Lord tells Moses in Exodus 31:13 that these Sabbaths were a sign between Him and the Israelites. He repeats this to Moses in Exodus 31:17. It is also reiterated in Ezekiel 20:12 and 20. The repetition emphasizes the importance the Lord attached to the Israelites observing His Sabbaths.

The story of the Israelites obeying the Lord’s instructions to construct and furnish the tabernacle begins with a repetition of the Sabbath law because it was the sign of the covenant. Obeying the Sabbath would serve as weekly proof that the Israelites were keeping their end of the covenant. The keeping of the Sabbath would affirm one’s loyalty to the Lord and would guarantee His presence and deliverance. It would manifest to the heathen nations the covenant relationship the Israelites possessed with the Lord.
The Israelites must conscientiously observe the Sabbath as a testimony of the Lord’s finished work in the restoration of the earth and was an essential part of their sanctification as a people. The observance of the Sabbath as a corporate unit by the Israelites would serve as a powerful testimony to the heathen nations surrounding them that they were a people set apart to serve the Lord exclusively. It would demonstrate that Yahweh was present with the Israelites.

The Lord tells Moses in Exodus 31:13 and 16 that the observance of the Sabbath was applicable for all subsequent generations and was perpetual. The purpose of this perpetual observance of the Sabbath was that the Israelites would know that the Lord is the one who sanctifies them. This means that observance of the Sabbath by the Israelites would manifest the fact that the Israelites were chosen from all the nations of the earth to be a people who represent Him to the rest of the nations.

In Exodus 31:14, the Israelites were to keep the Sabbath because “it is holy for you” which denotes that the Israelites must keep Saturday as a day set aside exclusively for God, i.e. worshipping Him. This day should be set aside exclusively by the Israelites as a day to bring into remembrance who God is and what He has done for them resulting in worshipping Him, i.e. giving thanks to Him.

In Exodus 31:14 and 15, the Lord tells Moses that failure to observe the Sabbath was a capital crime. Since the Sabbath was a sign of the covenant between the Lord and Israel, those in Israel who failed to keep the Sabbath were put to death (Exodus 31:14; Numbers 15:32-36; Jeremiah 17:19-27). Numbers 15:32-36 records the Israelites stoning a man found gathering wood on the Sabbath day.

Exodus 31:17 recalls Exodus 20:11, which presents the basis for the Sabbath day observance, which is God creating the time, matter, space continuum as well as mankind and restoring the heavens and the earth which was judged by God due to Satan’s rebellion against God. The fact that God is said to have “ceased” from His activity does not mean that He was tired but simply that He was satisfied with His work, which He had brought to completion by the seventh day. It means that there was nothing He could add to what He already accomplished during the six days, thus, it was perfect in every detail.

The Lord reminds Moses that the Israelites were to observe the Sabbath in connection with the tabernacle worship since worship was to take place on the Sabbath and if it was not observed conscientiously, worship in the tabernacle would not properly take place. Therefore, proper use of the tabernacle demanded that the Israelites observe conscientiously the Sabbath.

The observance of the Sabbath is an ordinance given to the nation of Israel and not the church. Although the church was not given the ordinance to observe the Sabbath, they are commanded to enter into God’s Sabbath rest meaning to rest in
the promises of God and one’s union with Christ (cf. Hebrews 4). Though the Sabbath was not given to the church, the principle taught by it is applicable to the church, namely, that one is to set aside time to reflect upon who and what God is and what He has done on behalf of you. In other words, they are to set aside time for God and to be devote oneself to Him exclusively. So whether one observes Saturday or Sunday or Monday, a believer should not work seven days a week but take at least one day to devote exclusively to God.

The Sabbath law also opens the fulfillment section in chapters 35-40 because the tabernacle worship would take place on the Sabbath. Another reason for the Sabbath law at the beginning of chapters 35-40 was to keep the Israelites from violating the Sabbath law while constructing the tabernacle.

In Exodus 35:2, the reiteration of the prohibition against working on the Sabbath and the death penalty for those who violate the law appeared in Exodus 31:15.

The prohibition in Exodus 35:3 that the Israelites were not even to light a fire in their homes on the Sabbath was to prevent the Israelites from rationalizing that cooking meals is not work since eating was not prohibited as work. If you recall, the Lord provided a double portion of manna each sixth day in order to provide food for the Israelites to eat on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:14-35). Thus, because of this provision, no fires needed to be lit in the homes of the Israelites in order to cook meals. Also, the Lord knew that preparing and cooking meals would be work for the Israelite women, thus to cook on the Sabbath would be a clear violation of the law. Of course, not all fires were prohibited since those on the tabernacle altar were needed for the Sabbath offerings (Numbers 28:9). Furthermore, the Israelites were forbidden to even collect firewood on the Sabbath when it was not an emergency because it was considered work and thus could be punished with the death penalty (Numbers 15:32-36). If a family member was sick and fire was required, the head of the house could simply borrow wood from a neighbor.

Exodus 35:4-9: Reiteration of Offering Command

Exodus 35:4 Moses spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “This is the thing which the LORD has commanded, saying, 5 ‘Take from among you a contribution to the LORD; whoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it as the LORD’s contribution: gold, silver, and bronze, 6 and blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goats’ hair, 7 and rams’ skins dyed red, and porpoise skins, and acacia wood, 8 and oil for lighting, and spices for the anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense, 9 and onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece.’” (NASB95)
In Exodus 35:4-9, Moses reiterates with the Israelites the Lord’s command to take up an offering for the materials to build the tabernacle, which appeared in Exodus 25:1-7. In fact, Exodus 35:5-9 duplicates 23:3-7 verbatim.

Exodus 25:2 and 35:5 teach a basic principle of giving, namely that offerings to the Lord are to be voluntary and spontaneous and without coercion. Wanting to give to the Lord is still basic in dedicating anything to the Lord. This principle is emphasized in 1 Chronicles 29:5, 1 Corinthians 9:17, 2 Corinthians 9:7 and 1 Peter 5:2.

Exodus 25:1-9 and 35:5-9 specify exactly what the Lord wants from the Israelites. The four metals to be used in the construction of the tabernacle were gold, silver and bronze. The materials to be used in the construction were blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen as well as goat hair, rams’ skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and breastpiece.

The blue refers to dye made from shellfish and had a dark blue or purple-blue, almost violet color. The purple was a dye made from the shellfish or snail and was imported from Phoenicia. The scarlet was made from the eggs and bodies of the worm *coccus ilicus*, which is found with the holly plant. The powder made from the dried maggots produces a bright red-yellow color.

The fine linen was Egyptian that had more delicate strands than ordinary linen. The goat’s hair was spun into yarn (35:26) and was used to make the material for the first tent over the tabernacle. It was loosely woven and would allow breezes to pass through whereas the fibers expand and prevent water from seeping through when it rained.

The materials for the tabernacle are categorized according to type. The metals are first (verse 3), then the fabrics are listed (verse 4), then the skins and wood (verse 5), which is followed by the lamp oil, the fragrant anointing oil ingredients (verse 6), which were to be used on the breast piece of the high priest (verse 7).

The metals would be used for covering the wooden framework of the tabernacle and for covering the altars, the table and the ark. Some would be used for the solid gold rings that held the ark poles (verse 12), the gold plates, dishes, bowls and pitchers (verse 29), the lampstand (verses 31ff.) as well as the mercy seat on the ark (verses 17-22).

The fabrics would be used for the curtains (26:1ff.) and for the garments for the priests (28:2ff.). The skins would serve to shield the tabernacle from the elements (26:14). The wood would be used for the framework for anything that needed to have strong spans such as the rafters of the tabernacle, the table, altar surfaces and legs for the ark (25:10ff.), the table (25:23ff.) and the altar (27:1ff.).

The oil would be used as fuel for the oil lamps of the tabernacle lampstand (25:3ff.; cf. 27:20-21) as well as the main ingredient of the anointing oil, which
was to be used on a regular basis by the priests (30:22ff.). The incense was compounded into a formula for the exclusive use of the tabernacle from the ingredients donated by the Israelites (30:34ff.).

The gemstones would adorn part of the ephod (28:6ff.) as well as the breast piece of the high priest (28:15ff.). They would represent each of the twelve tribes of Israel when they were symbolically brought into the presence of the Lord regularly by the high priest. They would be over his heart.

Exodus 35:10-19: Reiteration of Call for Skilled Workers

Exodus 35:10 “Let every skillful man among you come, and make all that the Lord has commanded: 11 the tabernacle, its tent and its covering, its hooks and its boards, its bars, its pillars, and its sockets; 12 the ark and its poles, the mercy seat, and the curtain of the screen; 13 the table and its poles, and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; 14 the lampstand also for the light and its utensils and its lamps and the oil for the light; 15 and the altar of incense and its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the doorway at the entrance of the tabernacle; 16 the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin and its stand; 17 the hangings of the court, its pillars and its sockets, and the screen for the gate of the court; 18 the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court and their cords; 19 the woven garments for ministering in the holy place, the holy garments for Aaron the priest and the garments of his sons, to minister as priests.” (NASB95)

In Exodus 35:10, Moses reiterates with the Israelites the Lord’s call for skilled workers to build the tabernacle which appeared in Exodus 31:1-11. “Let every skillful man among you” summarizes the earlier instructions that various tabernacle parts were to be constructed by “a skilled craftsman” (26:1, 31” or “all the skilled men” (28:3) or the “work of a skilled craftsman” (28:6, 15). “All that the Lord has commanded” in Exodus 35:10 reflects the language of 31:6 and would be reiterated in 39:32.

The command to build the tabernacle in Exodus 35:10-11 is found in Exodus 26:1 and will be summarized in Exodus 39:32-33. The various component parts of the tabernacle which are mentioned here in Exodus 35:10-19 were first mentioned in Exodus 25-26.

In Exodus 35:12, the Ark of the Covenant is mentioned, which is described in Exodus 25:10-12 and its carrying poles are described in Exodus 25:13-16 and its atonement cover in 25:17-22. The veil that separated the holy of holies from the holy place is mentioned in Exodus 26:31-35. Exodus 37:1-9 records the fulfillment
of the command to build the ark. The fulfillment to make the special curtain to separate the holy of holies from the holy place appears in Exodus 36:35 and 39:34.

“Ark” is the noun ארון (aw-rone), which was a chest or ornate box containing sacred artifacts of worship. The ark was the only piece of furniture within the Holy of Holies. It was called the “Ark of the Covenant” (Hebrew: ‘aron berit, Num. 10:33), or “Ark of the Testimony” (Hebrew: ‘aron ha`edut, Ex. 25:22), from the law that was kept therein. It was made of acacia wood two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits broad, and one and a half cubits high (external dimensions) and was plated inside and out with pure gold.

Running around each side was a gold border extending above the top of the Ark, so as to keep the lid from moving. This lid was called the “mercy seat” (Ex. 25:20, 22, Hebrew: kapporet, a “covering”), and was the same size as the Ark itself, and was made of acacia wood covered with gold.

The ark was transported by means of two gold-covered poles run through two gold rings on each side, from which they were not to be moved (25:15) unless it might be necessary to remove them in order to cover the Ark when the Tabernacle was moved (Num. 4:6). Upon the lid, or mercy seat, or at the ends of the ark, as in the temple, were placed the cherubim, probably figures beaten out of gold, as was the lampstand. In shape they were probably human, with the exception of their wings, though some authorities think they were of the same complex form as the cherubim mentioned in Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:5-14). They were no doubt the normal or full height of a man and are always spoken of as maintaining an upright position (2 Chronicles 3:13). They stood facing each other, looking down upon the mercy seat, with their wings forward in a brooding attitude (Ex. 25:20; cf. Deut. 32:11). The golden censer, with which the high priest once a year entered the Most Holy Place, was doubtless set upon this lid.

The ark symbolized God’s presence as well as His holiness and in addition His covenant blessing upon the Israelites who were to respect this symbol, which portrayed the reality of God’s presence. However, the ark not only had a symbolic value but also a practical value as well in the sense that it held something extremely important, namely the Ten Commandments.

In Exodus 35:13, Moses mentions the “table” which stood in the holy place, which also contained the lampstand and the altar of incense. This “table” is first mentioned in Exodus 25:23-27. This table’s poles are mentioned 23:27-28 and its “utensils” in Exodus 25:29. The construction of the table is mentioned in Exodus 23:10-16. The bread of the presence would be put on this table, which was originally described in 25:30.

The table of the bread of the Presence (or showbread), the golden lampstand, and the altar of incense were located within the Holy Place. The table of the bread of the Presence, or showbread (Hebrew: shulhan lehem panim, “table of the face,”
i.e., of Jehovah) was placed on the north, or right, side, facing the lampstand (Exodus 26:35; 40:22). Again, it was made of acacia wood, two cubits long (3 feet), one broad (1 foot, 6 inches), and one and a half high (1 foot, 6 inches).

This proportion between the length and the height is accurately maintained in the sculptural form on the arch of Titus in Rome. The surface, or top of the table, rested on a frame a handbreadth deep; around it ran a rim with a border of gold projecting above the top to keep articles from slipping off the table. The legs were apparently mortised into the sides (as is usual today), with rings near each corner for the carrying staves (25:23-30; 37:10-16).

The bread placed upon the table (Hebrew: “bread of the Presence”) was made of fine wheat flour (unleavened), baked in twelve loaves (cakes), each containing one fifth of an ephah of flour. These, according to Jewish tradition, as well as the dimensions of the table, would seem to have been placed upon plates in two piles of six each. They were renewed every Sabbath, were to be eaten by the priests exclusively (and that in the sanctuary only), and were then replaced by fresh loaves (1 Sam. 21:6), which had been prepared overnight by the Levites (1 Chron. 9:32). To each pile of loaves incense was added, probably placed in bowls beside the bread, for a “memorial portion for the bread, even an offering made by fire to the Lord” (Lev. 24:5-9).

The utensils belonging to the table were as follows: (1) Dishes for the showbread. (2) Pans or spoons for the incense. (3) Jugs or jars for making wine with a spout for pouring. (4) Cups of pure gold.

The table of the bread of the Presence, or showbread, was a reminder that God fed His people Israel. It was also a type of Christ as the Bread of Life, the Sustainer of each individual believer-priest (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6). The manna portrayed the life-giving Christ and the showbread of the Presence the life-sustaining Christ. Christ is the Bread that came down from heaven (John 6:33-58). The bread prefigured the “grain of wheat” (12:24) pulverized in the mill of suffering (cf. 12:27) and subjected to the fire of divine judgment for sin (12:31-33).

The “lampstand” is mentioned in Exodus 35:14, which was first described in 25:31-36, 39-40 with its utensils mentioned in 25:38-39, its “lamps” in 25:37 and its “oil” in 27:10-21. In Exodus 39:37, all these are summarized as being fulfilled. The lampstand is described in 37:17-23 as being constructed but without mention of the oil.

The word “lampstand” is the noun מְנֹדֶרָה (menô·rā·hā) (men-o-raw‘a), which was composed of a base, a stem-shaft and holder for the lamp. The lamplight symbolized to the Israelites that the Lord was home.

The description of the lampstand in Exodus 25:31-40 indicates that it was a floor-standing candelabra-like structure made of pure gold with six branches and a trunk made to resemble an olive tree, which is used in Scripture a designation for
the nation of Israel (Jeremiah 11:16-17; Hosea 14:4-6; Romans 11:17-24). The trunk resembled an olive tree but had almond tree features. The lampstand not only provided light for the tabernacle but also symbolized that the nation of Israel was to be a light to the nations (cf. Zechariah 4:1-14; Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). It also typified Christ as the light of the world.

In Exodus 35:15, the “altar of incense” is mentioned, which is described in Exodus 30:1-10. Its “poles” are mentioned in 30:4-5, its “anointing oil” in 30:22-33 and “incense” in 30:34-38. These are all summarized in 39:38. The screen or curtain for the doorway at the entrance to the tabernacle was first mentioned in 26:36-37 and its fulfillment appears in 36:37. It will be mentioned again in 39:38, 40 and 40:28 with regards to Moses inspection of the completed tabernacle.

The priests would burn incense on the altar of incense and the fragrant aroma which ascended from the altar symbolized prayer or in other words it portrayed the prayers of the entire nation of Israel.

The first six verses reveal that the altar of incense was smaller than the bronze sacrifice altar or altar of burnt offering since it was eighteen inches square and thirty-six inches high. Like the ark (25:10-20) and in particular like the table of showbread (25:23-28), the altar of incense was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. However, like the bronze altar of burnt offering (27:1-8), it had horns that extended upward from its top.

The altar of incense had a decorative molding of gold around the edge of its top, which would keep the incense on the surface of the table preventing it from sliding off. Like the altar of burnt offering and the table of the showbread and the ark of the covenant, the incense altar also had gold rings through poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold, which could be inserted to carry it.

The altar of incense or incense altar stood in the holy place and specifically in front of the veil which separated the most holy place that contained the ark from the holy place, which contained the lampstand and table of showbread.

The Lord does not give Moses specific directions as to the placement of table of showbread or the golden lampstand. In Exodus 30:6, the Lord instructs Moses that he is to put this incense altar in front of this veil that is before the Ark of the testimony, which suggests that it was front and center directly before the veil or in the middle between the table and the lampstand.

The location of the incense altar has been a cause for confusion among some expositors since Hebrews 9:4 appears to describe its location as being in the holy of holies or most holy place rather than the holy place where the lampstand and table of showbread resided. However, Exodus 30:6, 40:3-5, 21-27 explicitly state that it was located with the golden lampstand and table of showbread.

**Hebrews 9:3** Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, 4 having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the
covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the
manna, and Aaron’s rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant.  
(NASB95)

The reason Hebrews 9:3-4 describes the incense altar as being located in the
holy of holies is that there was an intimate association between the altar of incense
and the Ark of the Covenant because the smoke of the incense burned penetrated
the veil and permeated the holy of holies as it ascended before the ark. Therefore,
the writer of Hebrews to reflect this intimate association tied together the altar of
incense and the ark by using the same participle ἔχω, which the NASB95 renders
“having.”

The offering of incense on the altar of incense coincided with the morning and
evening sacrifices, which are described in Exodus 29:38-42. Thus, it took place
when the high priest was tending to the seven lamps on the lampstand which are
mentioned in Exodus 25:31-39. He would put out these lamps in the morning and
prepare them for lighting again once by the evening time. The spacing of these
offerings with one in the morning and one before sundown was intended to teach
Israel that they were to pray “night” and “day” or in other words during the course
of their day.

The Lord warns Moses in Exodus 30:9 that this altar of incense is to be used for
nothing but burning incense. He was not to use any incense but that which He
prescribes to use. There were to be no burnt offerings on this altar nor meal
offering and nor was drink offerings to be poured out on it at any time.

In Exodus 30:10, the Lord instructs Moses to make atonement on the horns of
the incense altar once a year on the Day of Atonement with some of the blood of
the offering for atonement, which was to be a perpetual statute. In Exodus 29:1,
we saw that the horns of the altar of burnt offering were to be dabbed with blood at the
consecration of the priests (Exodus 29:1, 10-12; Leviticus 8:14-15; 9:9).

Like the horns on the altar of burnt offering, the horns of the incense altar were
protrusions, which curved upward from the flat plane of the main surface of the
altar. This contributed in holding anything on the altar from falling over the edge. The horns on both altars portray God’s power since the horns of an animal
signified its power.

In Exodus 30:10, the Lord describes the altar of incense as “most holy to the
Lord” rather than the process of purifying the altar annually since the process was
the means to making and keeping the altar “most holy,” i.e. belonging to God and
fit for the use which He prescribed for it.

The formula for this anointing oil was unique as the product was holy in that it
contained about twelve and a half pounds of myrrh, six and a half pounds of
cinnamon, six and a half pounds of cane, twelve and a half pounds of cassia and
four quarts of olive oil. The quantity of these ingredients was about thirty-eight
pounds in modern measurement. When mixed together, these ingredients would produce a fragrant blend.

This anointing oil was to be used to anoint the tent of meeting, the ark of the testimony, the table of showbread and all its utensils, the golden lampstand and its utensils, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the bronze laver of water and its base. Therefore, verses 26-30 describes how all the articles mentioned in chapters 25-30 were required to be anointed with this special oil with the exception of the high priest’s clothing, including the ephod and its breastpiece. Exodus 29:7 records the Lord instructing Moses to anoint Aaron and Exodus 29:21 records the Lord instructing Moses to anoint his clothes.

Anointing these articles of the tabernacle would sanctify them meaning that they were qualified to be used in serving God in the tabernacle. It means that they would be set apart to be used exclusively for worshipping the Lord in the tabernacle. The anointing oil was also to be applied to Aaron and his sons so that they like the articles of the tabernacle could be set apart to be used exclusively to worship and serve Him in the tabernacle. Therefore, the Israelites were being taught by the Lord that the anointing of the tabernacle and its furniture as well as Aaron and his sons and their clothing were set apart to be exclusively used in the worship and service of the Lord in the tabernacle.

The Israelites are told by God that this anointing oil was to be used throughout their generations as a nation. He warned them that it must not be applied to the body of any Israelite. It could only be applied to Aaron and his sons and their future generations. The Israelites were also warned to not use this same recipe since it was holy meaning that God wanted this anointing oil to be used exclusively for His purposes in the service and worship of Himself in the tabernacle. The Lord warns the Israelites that failure to comply with this order would result in being cut off, i.e. executed, i.e. the death penalty.

This anointing oil was related to ceremonial cleanness and was a symbol of holiness. The Lord demanded that his priests who would serve in His house be clean and pure. This anointing oil applied to them would symbolize that they were. Interestingly, this anointing oil had a practical use in that it actually killed lice, which was endemic in biblical times. To have lice would constitute a person as unclean and impure in God’s judgment and among human beings today. Anointing the articles of the tabernacle would help protect them from any lice accidentally transmitted by a priest or his clothing which was not properly anointed with this oil. The priest and his clothing could receive lice from contact with those Israelites who had lice. Lice are not holy so the Lord wanted the articles of the tabernacle and its priests to be free from lice.

In Exodus 30:34-38, we have the Lord giving Moses instructions concerning the formulation and use of a special incense, which was to be placed in front of the
ark of the testimony in the tent of meeting. This indicates that it was to be burned on the altar of incense, which was in front of the curtain to the most holy place. Like the anointing oil mentioned in verses 22-33, this special incense was to be used exclusively for use in the tabernacle. It was to be prepared by mixing equal amounts of three spices and frankincense.

The mixture of the spices listed in Exodus 30:34 were properly salted and then ground to powder and placed on the incense altar, which was located in front of the testimony in the tent of meeting. When this powder was burned, it would give off a fragrant smoke, which honored God and symbolized the prayers of the Israelites.

In Exodus 30:36-37, the Lord instructs Moses to remind the Israelites of the holiness of this incense, which means that it was to be used exclusively in the tabernacle worship and for no other purpose. Like the anointing oil, the recipe for this incense was not to be copied for some other use. Failure to comply would result in being cut off from the Israelites, which refers to the death penalty. This final warning completes the description of the tabernacle and its furnishings.

Exodus 26:36-37 teaches that was distinct from the dividing veil in front of the holy of holies/most holy place. It hung at the front of the tabernacle and served as an entrance curtain. This veil was designed and composed of the same fabrics and colors as the special veil which separated the holy of holies from the most holy place. However, it did not have cherubim woven into it. Furthermore the bases for the golden posts were to be bronze and not silver (cf. verse 32) since this curtain would be part of the exterior that had bronze throughout. The use of bronze rather than silver represented the fact that the closer a person was to the presence of God, as symbolized by the ark, the closer you were to holiness and glory. Consequently, the farther away you were from the presence of God, there would be less contact with the holiness and glory of God. This curtain mentioned in verses 36-37 would be supported by five posts or columns and not four as was the case with the inner curtain (cf. verse 32). The same the method for hanging or joining the inner curtains was used for this curtain.

The “altar of burnt offering” is mentioned in Exodus 35:16. The Lord issued the command to build it in 27:1-8, its “bronze grating” in 27:4-5, its “poles” in 27:6-7, its “utensils” in 27:3. The fulfillment of this command is found in 38:1 whereas 40:6, 10, 29 record it being set up. The “bronze grating” is also mentioned in 38:4-5, 30 and 39:39 and its poles in 38:5 and 39:39 as well as its utensils in 38:30 and 39:33.

Exodus 27:1-8 teaches that in the courtyard of the tabernacle, there was an altar called “the altar of burnt offering” (Exodus 30:28; Leviticus 4:7, 10, 18) and it was also called the “bronze altar” (Exodus 38:30). Unlike the altar of incense which was located in the Holy of Holies and mentioned in Exodus 30:1-10, this altar was used exclusively for animal sacrifices.
The altar of burnt offering or the bronze altar was five cubits long and five cubits wide and its height three cubits. This means that it would have been seven feet six inches long and seven feet six inches wide and four feet six inches in height. Thus, there was a total of fifty-six and one-quarter square feet of grilling area. Of course, minus whatever was taken up by the corner “horns” and any rim that may have surrounded the top, if either of these imposed upon the total surface top. The corners of the altar had horns, which were actually protrusions, which curved upward from the flat plane of the main surface of the altar. This contributed in holding anything on the altar from falling over the edge. The horns were to be covered with blood at the consecration of the priests (Exodus 29:1, 10-12; Leviticus 8:14-15; 9:9) and on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:18). Leviticus 6:13 teaches that the fire on this altar was never allowed to go out.

The implements to be used in serving at this altar were composed of bronze, which was the metal used outdoors in the ancient world. The utensils that were used for serving at the altar included: (1) Ash pots to catch the ashes from the surface temporarily before dumping. (2) Shovels for cleaning the altar or removing the ashes and reconfiguring the live coals, which cooked the meat. (3) Sprinkling basins that would hold liquids for sprinkling water on the flames to moderate them or sprinkling cooking oil on the food or on the surface altar. (4) Meat hooks for handling the meat. (5) Firepots to hold live coals for getting new fires going each morning (38:3; Num. 16:17) (6) Snuffers (Ex. 25:38).

The method of transporting this altar was much like the transportation method employed for the ark. Namely, two acacia wood poles overlaid with metal, which in this case would be bronze and they would be inserted through rings fixed on two sides of the altar. This was for the purpose that the altar could be carried by a group of Levitical priests. More than likely there would be eight of these priests transporting the altar.

This altar taught the Israelites that they, as sinners, could only approach a holy God by means of a substitutionary sacrifice, which would atone for their sins. Theses sacrifices portrayed the substitutionary spiritual and physical deaths of Jesus Christ on the cross (Hebrews 10:1-18). The positioning of the altar in the tabernacle courtyard before the entrance into the tabernacle taught the Israelites that they could not approach a holy God as sinners without a sacrifice. This atonement sacrifice for sin was taught by Adam and Eve to their children. Abel offered a blood animal sacrifice whereas Cain did not. The Lord accepted the former and not the latter.

It was to be lightweight and not a solid box. Rather it was to be a framework of wood overlaid with bronze as well as a bronze top grating along with a wood net/strainer/grillwork. The last part of this verse reminds the reader that there were more details with regards to this altar than have been provided here in writing.
The altar of burnt offering was fundamentally different from the pagan altars of the day, which were intended to appease their gods or the feeding of the gods’ appetites in the hope that they might be bribed or cajoled into sparing them from illness or disaster by virtue of the offerings they placed on the altar.

The bronze basin mentioned in Exodus 35:16 was commanded to be built in 30:17-21. The fulfillment of this command is found in 39:8 and 39. Also, it is mentioned in the description of the setting up of the tabernacle in 40:7, 11 and 30.

This round laver or basin for holding water was placed upon a pedestal or base according to the Lord’s instructions to Moses in Exodus 30:18. This was to let water run out through taps of some kind for the priests to wash. They could not simply dip their dirty hands into the basin. This was for the priests to primarily wash their hands and feet before entering the tent. In Exodus 30:18, the Lord tells Moses that it should be in the courtyard between the altar and the tent. No dimensions are given to the reader.

Now, as we noted in previous chapters in the book of Exodus, the altar portrays the cross of Christ and the animals sacrificed on this altar portray Jesus Christ’s spiritual and physical deaths on the cross. The washing basin was placed after the bronze altar of burnt offering before the tent of meeting which contained the holy place and holy of holies. In relation to the moment of conversion, the washing basin portrays the baptism of the Spirit, which refers to the Spirit uniting the believer to the Holy One, Jesus Christ and identifying the believer with Him in His crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and session (1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 Peter Titus 3:5; 3:18-21). In relation to experiential sanctification and fellowship, the washing basin portrays the purification from sin as a result of confession of sin to the Father (1 John 1:9). The basis for the forgiveness of sins in relation to both justification and sanctification is Jesus Christ’s finished work on the cross. So the washing basin portrays the baptism of the Spirit which takes place at the moment of conversion and the confession of sin after conversion.

In Exodus 35:17, the “hangings” or “curtains” of the court were commanded to be made in 27:9, 12, 16, and 18. The record of their being made is found in 38:9, 15-18 and 39:40. Their “posts” and “bases” were described in 27:10-17. Descriptions of their fulfillment also appear in 38:9-19, 30 and 39:40. Exodus 40:18 records the erection of these posts and bases. The command to make the curtain for the courtyard is found in 26:36 and 27:14, 16. It will be mentioned again in 38:14-18 and 39:38-40 as well as in the account of the tabernacle’s erection in 40:5, 8, 28, and 33.

Exodus 27:9-19 tell the reader that the tabernacle complex was rectangular in shape. The courtyard was 150 feet (100 cubits) long and 75 feet (50 cubits) wide, or 11,250 square feet. In Exodus 27:9-11, we have the description of the courtyard beginning with the two longest sides, namely the north and the south, each of
which had one hundred and fifty feet (one hundred cubits) of curtains made of twisted linen supported by twenty posts (one every seven and a half feet or every five cubits). The text does not specify what the posts were made of but more than likely it would have been acacia wood. They were probably not overlaid with any metal, although they have bronze bases which were like the bases of the special pillars at the entrance to the tabernacle. It has silver bands around them from which were hung the curtains all around by means of silver hooks.

Exodus 27:12-15, we have a description of the west and east ends of the courtyard, which is half the length of the north and south sides. The dimensions presented in these verses seem to indicate square curtains which were seven and a half feet (five cubits) on each side, which were attached to poles spaced just like the longer sides. The east side was the place of entrance is thus treated differently. It was seventy-five feet (fifty cubits) wide with two curtains coming from each corner toward the center. The curtains stretched twenty-two and a half feet (fifteen cubits) each, thus leaving a gap in the center of the east side of thirty feet (twenty cubits).

The material of the curtains is not specified but they probably were of the same material used in making the south, west and north sides. Their supporting bases would be spaced the same as the others were. These curtains were rectangular and not square since their length of twenty-two and a half feet (fifteen cubits) was three times their height (seven and a half feet or five cubits).

In Exodus 27:16, the Lord tells Moses that a special entrance curtain hung in the center of the east side, which was thirty feet (twenty cubits) wide. It was composed of material like the inner curtains of the tabernacle with the exception of the cherubim woven into them. This verse says that this curtain was to have four posts and four bases. The spaces of the supporting posts for this entrance curtain were the same on average as all the others around the courtyard, namely seven and a half feet or five cubits. Verse 17 tells the reader that all the posts around the courtyard were same. The curtain was one piece, which means that it was used for closing up the courtyard at night. During the daytime, this curtain would be gathered to one side to allow access.

The “pegs” of the tabernacle mentioned in Exodus 35:18 were to made of bronze according to Exodus 27:19. The fulfillment of these bronze pegs is found in 38:20, 31 and 39:40.

Exodus 35:19 makes mention of the garments for Aaron and his sons, which they were to wear while ministering in the tabernacle.

The order for the manufacture of these garments appears in 31:10. The command to prepare these priestly garments was given in exhaustive detail in chapters 28-29 and summarized in 31:10. Exodus 40:13-16 describes the fulfillment of this order.
Exodus 35:20-29: Israelites Provide Tabernacle Materials

Exodus 35:20 Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel departed from Moses’ presence. 21 Everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the LORD’s contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. 22 Then all whose hearts moved them, both men and women, came and brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and bracelets, all articles of gold; so did every man who presented an offering of gold to the LORD. 23 Every man, who had in his possession blue and purple and scarlet material and fine linen and goats’ hair and rams’ skins dyed red and porpoise skins, brought them. 24 Everyone who could make a contribution of silver and bronze brought the LORD’s contribution; and every man who had in his possession acacia wood for any work of the service brought it. 25 All the skilled women spun with their hands, and brought what they had spun, in blue and purple and scarlet material and in fine linen. 26 All the women whose heart stirred with a skill spun the goats’ hair. 27 The rulers brought the onyx stones and the stones for setting for the ephod and for the breastpiece; 28 and the spice and the oil for the light and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. 29 The Israelites, all the men and women, whose heart moved them to bring material for all the work, which the LORD had commanded through Moses to be done, brought a freewill offering to the LORD. (NASB95)

Exodus 35:20-29 tells us the reader that the tabernacle project was a nationwide effort since this passage says that all of Israel responded to the Lord’s command in Exodus 25:1-7 to provide materials for the construction of the tabernacle. There were no exceptions, everyone in the Israelites community contributed to the tabernacle project and not just the leaders of the people.

In Exodus 35:21, the “tent of meeting” summarizes the tabernacle and all its furniture as commanded in chapters 25-27 and 30:1-10, 17-21. The expression “all its service” refers to the contents of chapter 28 and 30:22-37. “Holy garments” refers to the priestly garments mentioned in chapter 28. The command to make the ephod appears in 28:6-14, the breastpiece in 28:15-30, the High Priest’s robe in 28:31-35, the turban forehead plate in 28:36-38, the High Priest’s tunic, turban and sash in 28:39 and the garments for the other priests are mentioned in 28:40-43. The “ephod” refers to a garment like that of a vest or a coat over one’s robe, which the high priest was to wear in the tabernacle when serving. It was the distinguishing mark of the high priest Aaron. Exodus 28:4-5 tell the reader that the material used to make this garment of the high priest was gold, blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen. It covered the body from thigh to shoulder without
covering either the arms or legs. It was typically worn by priests or temple servants (e.g. 1 Samuel 2:18; 22:18). The ephod worn by Aaron was a very elaborate and impressive sort of ceremonial vest or coat worn over his other garments. Symbolically, it signified that Aaron was to represent God among the Israelites. It became a symbol of God’s presence among the Israelites.

Chapter 28 distinguishes the ephod from the breastpiece, which was attached to it for the purpose of discerning God’s will through the Urim and Thummim. The term “ephod” eventually referred to both articles in the sense of the breastpiece attached to the ephod since they were not used separately but always together. The books in the Old Testament that come after Exodus use the term “ephod” on a consistent basis to refer to both articles of clothing.

The ephod was made of the same fabric and colors as the rest of Aaron’s garments as well as the inner curtains of the tabernacle itself. Exodus 28:6 tell the reader that it was to be made by a skilled craftsman which would thus make it a high-quality garment. The two shoulder pieces mentioned in Exodus 28:7 were either loops or straps that permitted the front and the back of the garment to be tied together once the ephod was placed on the high priest.

The ephod was to be secured around Aaron’s waist according to Exodus 28:8 since the phrase “woven band” actually refers to a woven waistband. A special, elaborate “waistband” was to be attached to the ephod and was to be of the same fabric and color as the rest of the ephod. This “waistband” would be tied around Aaron, the high priest much like the waistband of a bathrobe or waistband that ties at the front of a jacket or vest.

In Exodus 28:9-10, we have the Lord telling Moses that two onyx stones were to have the names of the sons of Israel engraved on them with six of the names on one stone and the other remaining six on the second stone according to the order of their birth. Onyx was a type of quartz with varicolored bands and was imported in biblical times as a precious stone comparable in value to gold and sapphire (Genesis 2:12; Job 28:16). The variously colored bands of onyx make it an excellent material for carving in the sense that a skilled engraver can carve the stone so that the engraving is in a completely different color than the background, which would make it a highly suitable material for signets and seals.

Exodus 28:11-14 tells the reader that the onyx stones were to be carefully engraved with the names of the sons of Israel cut deeply and permanently in the stones, which were to be mounted in filigree or fancy gold settings that would enhance their dignity. The stones were to be fastened permanently to the shoulders of the ephod by braided gold chains. This was to be worn by Aaron whenever he ministered in the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle. This was to remind the Israelites that Aaron represented not only himself but the entire house of Israel. It was to emphasize that everyone in Israel was important to the Lord with no
exceptions. These onyx stones would hang by their special gold chains and would of course swing as Aaron moved, which would be a visible reminder of the Israelites corporate solidarity with Aaron before the Lord.

The breastpiece was a square pouch, which was used for divination. It was eighteen inches square and was basically a fancy pocket worn over the high priest’s chest as part of the ephod that held the stones used for discerning the will of God.

The breastpiece was made of the same material and colors as the ephod. The colors of the breastpiece were blue, purple, scarlet and was made of gold according to this verse, which corresponds to the gold and the colors that composed the inner part of the tabernacle. Also, this verse reveals that the breastpiece had to be made by an artistic designer or skilled craftsman. This all emphasizes the fact that the tabernacle and the priesthood, which officiated in the tabernacle worship were integrated so as to represent the Lord to the Israelites and vice versa. The breastpiece was to be square and when doubled it was nine inches long and nine inches wide.

Exodus 28:29-30 tell the reader two specific purposes for the breastpiece, namely representation and divination. The former meant that the high priest would represent the twelve tribes of Israel when he served in the tabernacle. The latter was related to the Urim and Thummim, which was used to determine the will of God.

The Urim and Thummim meant “lights” and “perfections” respectively and are mentioned in Numbers 27:21, 1 Samuel 30:7-8, Ezra 2:63, and Nehemiah 8:65. They were two objects that were used by the Israelites to determine the will of God. They were to be placed in the breastpiece of decision and were to be over the heart of the high priest when he served in the tabernacle in the presence of the Lord. The Urim and Thummim were simply colored stones employed by the Israelites at certain times as devices of divination and possessed no intrinsic powers. They were used to determine the will of God with regards to the nation of Israel rather than for guidance for individuals.

This passage reveals that the Lord commands Moses to make the robe of the ephod completely blue, which stands in contrast to the multicolored ephod with its multicolored breastpiece. This blue colored robe was to be worn underneath the ephod, which also contained a blue color. This solid colored robe underneath the ephod was to have a round aperture large enough for the high priest to slip over his head. The circle of this hole was to be protected by a sturdy border that would prevent tearing or serious wear as it was put on and taken off during the performance of the high priest’s duties. This robe would have been approximately eight feet long since it had a front and back and would hang to the ankles. All
around the hem of the robe, there were to be blue, purple and scarlet pomegranates and bells composed of gold.

The High Priest’s tunic was a long white coat worn beneath the robe of the ephod and was more complete than a loincloth and reached to the knees. The standard garment worn by both men and women in the biblical period was a linen tunic. Worn next to the skin, ankle length, with long sleeves, it provided protection from the sun and sometimes was embroidered or given a fancy hem by the wealthy (Gen 37:3 and 2 Sam 13:18–19) or by priests. The sash was a wide belt worn around the waist of the high priest and was to be the work of an embroiderer.

The tunics, sashes and caps for Aarons’ sons which were for dignity and honor in the sense that these articles would provide them with high status in the Israelite community so that they are respected.

The fabrics mentioned in Exodus 35:23 are mentioned in 25:4-5, 26:1, 7, 14, 31, 36, 27:16, 28:5, 8, 15, 33, 39.

The “silver” and “bronze” mentioned in Exodus 35:24 were used in the tabernacle and its courtyard and for various objects like the posts and bases (See 25:3; 26:11, 19, 21, 25, 32, 37; 27:2, 6, 10, 17; 30:18; 31:4; 35:5). The “acacia wood” in Exodus 35:24 was the main structural ingredient for the tabernacle and for its various articles of furniture (See 25:5, 10, 13, 23, 28; 26:15, 26, 32, 37; 27:1, 6; 30:1, 5; 35:7).

In Exodus 35:25, all the skilled women in Israel who spun yarn and linen thread contributed to the tabernacle project. This important and critical to the project since if yarn or thread is not spun properly, a fabric made from it cannot be neat and even and thus will not be strong and durable. This verse also mentions the various colors used in the project.

Exodus 35:26 tells the reader that the woman spun goat’s hair which was used for the large number of goat hair curtains that were required for the project as well as for the protective coverings for the tabernacle (see 25:4; 26:7-13; 36:14-18).

The inner curtains were ten in number with each measuring forty-two feet (twenty-eight cubits) long and six feet (four cubits) wide (26:1-2). The inner curtains provided 2,520 square feet for the inner wall and ceiling surfacing. The second layer of curtains also went over the top and sides of the tabernacle. They protected the colorful curtains that hung within the tabernacle since they would lie right over them. This second layer of curtains was made of goat hair, which was a black weather-resistant material which is still used by Bedouins today when they make tents for themselves. The width of these eleven middle curtains was six feet (four cubits), which is the same as the inner curtains. However, the length of these curtains was longer than the inner curtains with the former being forty-five feet.

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(thirty cubits) whereas the latter was forty-two feet (twenty-eight cubits). Thus, this second layer of protective curtains provided 2,970 square feet of surface or in other words 450 square feet more than the inner curtains.

The goat hair curtains that formed the second layer were joined into two sets with one made up of five curtains which correspond to the inner curtains which were joined into sets of five. However, the other set of curtains was composed of six curtains. The last of this group was at the front edge of the tabernacle, which served as a protective curtain by closing off the front of the tabernacle when needed.

Just as there were two sets of inner curtains which were joined by fifty gold rings connecting fifty loops on each set, so the goat hair curtains were joined by fifty bronze rings. This second layer of curtains composed of goat hair was seen as a single covering when they were all joined together. It was wider and longer than the inner layer of curtains. It was longer for the simple reason that it contained an extra curtain and it was wider since each curtain was made to have additional length.

Exodus 26:12-13 indicates that there could be an overlap of this second or middle layer of curtains on top of the inner layer. This would be the case on both the back and sides of the tabernacle.

Exodus 26:14 presents a description of two other layers of covering for the tabernacle. The third layer was composed of “rams’ skins dyed red” with the fourth or outer layer composed of “porpoise skins” (NASB95) or “hides of sea cows.” The latter would be seen most of the time by the Israelites and would be the layer exposed to the elements. The hides of these sea cows or porpoises was thick and durable and would protect the tabernacle from the hot sun, rain, snow, dew, frost, dust and sand. It would also be able to withstand the repeated setting up and tearing down of the tabernacle, which would take place whenever the Israelites were traveling from place to place.

The “onyx stones” mentioned in Exodus 35:27 were first mentioned in 25:7, 28:9 and 20. The fulfillment of the commands in these verses appears in 39:10-14.

Onyx was a type of quartz with varicolored bands and was imported in biblical times as a precious stone comparable in value to gold and sapphire (Genesis 2:12; Job 28:16). The variously colored bands of onyx make it an excellent material for carving in the sense that a skilled engraver can carve the stone so that the engraving is in a completely different color than the background, which would make it a highly suitable material for signets and seals.

Exodus 28:11-14 tells the reader that the onyx stones were to be carefully engraved with the names of the sons of Israel cut deeply and permanently in the stones, which were to be mounted in filigree or fancy gold settings that would enhance their dignity. The stones were to be fastened permanently to the shoulders
of the ephod by braided gold chains. This was to be worn by Aaron whenever he ministered in the presence of the Lord in the tabernacle. This was to remind the Israelites that Aaron represented not only himself but the entire house of Israel. It was to emphasize that everyone in Israel was important to the Lord with no exceptions. These onyx stones would hang by their special gold chains and would of course swing as Aaron moved, which would be a visible reminder of the Israelites corporate solidarity with Aaron before the Lord.


Exodus 35:29 summarizes Exodus 35:20-28 and emphasizes that both men and women contributed voluntarily to the tabernacle project. It tells the reader that their contributions were for the work of the Lord. Also, it emphasizes that God was responsible for this command.

Wiersbe writes “Moses had already told the people that God wanted their willing gifts so that the tabernacle could be built (25:1–8). What grace that God would accept gifts from a people who had disobeyed Him and grieved His heart. These were to be willing gifts from the heart (vv. 5, 21, 26, 29), for the Lord loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:6–8). Most of this wealth probably came from the people of Egypt (12:35–36)—delayed wages for all the work the Jews had done for the Egyptians. It was “the Lord’s offering” (vv. 22, 24, 29), and therefore, they wanted to give their best. In fact, they gave so generously that Moses had to stop them from bringing more (36:4–7). We wonder if that problem ever exists in the church today!”

Exodus 35:30-35: Moses Appoints and Endorses Bezalel and Oholiab

Exodus 35:30 Then Moses said to the sons of Israel, “See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. 31 And He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding and in knowledge and in all craftsmanship; 32 to make designs for working in gold and in silver and in bronze, 33 and in the cutting of stones for settings and in the carving of wood, so as to perform in every inventive work. 34 He also has put in his heart to teach, both he and Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach,
of the tribe of Dan. 35 He has filled them with skill to perform every work of an engraver and of a designer and of an embroiderer, in blue and in purple and in scarlet material, and in fine linen, and of a weaver, as performers of every work and makers of designs.” (NASB95)

In Exodus 35:30-35, Moses reiterates the Lord’s choice of Bezalel and Oholiab to oversee the construction of the tabernacle, which appeared in Exodus 31:2-6.

“Bezalel” (BEHZ-uh-lehl) was to oversee the construction of the tabernacle and its furnishings. He descended from the tribe of Judah and was the son of Uri (yoo-RICH) and his grandfather was Hur (HUHR). His family tree appears in 1 Chronicles 2:4-20. His name means “in the shadow of El (God)” or in other words “in the protection of God.”

“The Lord has called by name Bezalel” means that the Lord chose Bezalel to oversee the construction of the tabernacle and the production of the furnishings and various articles and utensils connected to the worship that would take place in it. This translation reflects a Hebrew idiom that connotes specifically selecting an individual to a specific job. Thus, Bezalel and no one else could oversee the tabernacle project. There could be no substitute to be used in his place. The Lord wanted his specific skills and background, which He would enhance by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Exodus 31:3 and 35:31 record that the Lord filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God in wisdom, understanding, knowledge and all kinds of craftsmanship. Then, in verse 4 the Lord reveals the purpose for doing so, namely in order to make artistic designs for work with gold, silver and with bronze with cutting and setting stone and with cutting wood to work in all kinds of craftsmanship. Verse 4 tells the reader what materials were to be employed by Bezalel in the construction of the tabernacle, namely acacia wood, gold, silver, bronze, and other gemstones and fabric. These are all mentioned in detail in Exodus 25-30.

“He has filled him with the Spirit of God” is composed of the third person masculine singular piel active imperfect form of the verb mā·lē (maw-lay’), “He has filled with” and then we have the object marker ʾēt (ayth), which is followed by the third person masculine singular pronominal suffix –hû (who), “him” and then we have the feminine singular construct form of the noun rū·āh (roo’-akh), “with the Spirit of” which is followed by the masculine plural noun ʾē·lō·hîm (el-o-heem’), “God.”

The verb mā·lē does not mean “filled” but rather “to give” meaning that the Lord “gave” Bezalel the Holy Spirit in order to perform the task of overseeing the tabernacle project so as to meet His perfect standards. The verb refers to conferring to Bezalel the Holy Spirit as a gift.

This use of the verb appears in Exodus 28:3 where the NASB95 translates it “endowed” and is used in relation to the Lord imparting or giving skillful artisans
in Israel the ability to make Aarons’ garments. Here in Exodus 31:3, it is used of the Lord giving Bezalel the ability to accomplish the task of constructing the tabernacle and the production of its furnishings in a manner that meets the Lord’s perfect standards. This interpretation is further confirmed by the statements in Exodus 31:6 and 35:34-35, which record the Lord telling Moses that He had given Oholiab skill to complete the tabernacle project.

The piel stem of the verb מָלֵלְיָ (mā·lē·lē) is factitive meaning that the subject of this verb causes its direct object to enter a state that can be described by the same verb in the qal. Here the direct object is Bezalel. Thus, the piel stem indicates that the Lord caused Bezalel to enter the state of having been given the Holy Spirit to complete the task of the tabernacle project.

The noun רֻה (rû) refers to the Holy Spirit and is in the construct state meaning that it is governing the noun which follows it, which is the noun צֹלָה-הִים (zlā·hîm). This construction expresses a genitive relationship. Specifically, the noun צֹלָה-הִים is an appositional genitive which is an individual member of the class given by the construct term, which is רֻה. The sense of this construction is that the Lord gave Bezalel the Spirit, “who is” God. Some interpret this as a possessive genitive meaning “God’s Spirit.”

“In wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship” is composed of the preposition ב- (b-), “in” and its object is the feminine singular noun חֲק-מָה(hok·maw), “wisdom” and then we have the conjunction ו- (w-), “and” which is followed by the preposition ב- (b-), “in” and its object is the feminine singular qal infinitive construct form of the verb דָּח-א (dah´-ath), “knowledge” and once again we have the conjunction ו- (w-), “and” which is followed by the preposition ב- (b-), “in” and its object is the feminine singular qal infinitive construct form of the verb מַלְא (mel·aw), “craftsmanship” which is modified by the adjective כל (kōl), “all.”

In each instance, the preposition ב- is a marker of specification and means “with regards to” indicating that the Lord is telling Moses that He gave Bezalel the Spirit who is God “with regards to” wisdom, understanding, knowledge and each and every type of craftsmanship.

The noun חֲק-מָה(hok·maw) means “skill” i.e. the technical ability to perform a craft. The noun חֲק-ע-נָה(hok·unā) means “ability” i.e. the capability to perform a craft. The verb דָּח-א (dah´-ath) means “skillful” in the sense of knowledge applied to a particular craft. The noun מַלְא (mel·aw) means “craftsmanship” referring to a skill specific in a trade or occupation. The word is modified by the adjective כל (kōl) which means “every kind of” i.e. a totality of kinds or sorts.
Therefore, we can see that the Lord gave Bezalel the Spirit who is God with regards to the skill and ability and knowledge and with regards to each and every type of craftsmanship. By giving Bezalel the Spirit, the Lord gave him the technical ability to construct the tabernacle and produce its furnishings. He gave him the capability to perform this task and the capability to apply the knowledge necessary to perform this task. So the Holy Spirit enabled Bezalel to be wiser, more insightful and knowledgeable and more capable with regards to any type of craftsmanship with which the Lord assigned him. This was all so that his work would be up to God’s perfect standards. This entire expression means that God gave Bezalel the ability to perform the task which God assigned him and to fulfill this task exactly as He prescribed to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Exodus 31:6 and 35:34 records that the Lord also selected a man named “Oholiab” (oh-HOH-lih-ab) whose name literally means “tent of the father.” This verse says that his father was “Ahisamach” (uh-HIZ-uh-mak) and he was from the tribe of Dan. His name appears in Exodus 36:1-2 as well as 38:23, which record the fulfillment of the Lord’s instructions by Bezalel and Oholiab and the other craftsman assigned to the tabernacle project.

Stuart writes “Verse 35 of the present context also elaborates slightly on 31:6 in its listing of jobs done by both men and women, tasks already described in earlier contexts but here reprised as a way of reminding everyone of two things: (1) Bezalel and Oholiab were in charge of the work overall, but (2) they needed all sorts of help from experts so that the result would be one of excellence. This is also the force of the closing words of v. 35, “all of them master craftsmen and designers”—implying that no part of the tabernacle would be the work of mere amateurs but that all would be the best that human beings could make it, operating under divine design and giftedness. The tabernacle building project thus parallels what the work of God at its best has always entailed: an opportunity for everyone to contribute in some way, even if mainly by donation, and also an expectation that everything would be to the fullest and best extent and quality possible, by the people best qualified to do it, called for and guided by God.”

Wiersbe writes “The Holy Spirit gave Bezaleel and Aholiab the wisdom to know what to do and the ability to do it. In like manner, God has given gifts to His people today so that the church might be built up (1 Cor. 12–14; Eph. 4:1–17; Rom. 12). Bezaleel and Aholiab did not do all the work themselves but taught others who assisted them. In the succeeding verses, Moses names the various parts of the tabernacle one by one, as well as the garments of the priests. God is concerned with every detail of our work and does not minimize any aspect of it. The smallest hook for the curtains was as important to Him as the brazen altar.

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we are faithful in the small things, God can trust us with the bigger things (Luke 16:10). Scholars have estimated that in the construction of the tabernacle, the people used nearly a ton of gold, about three and a quarter tons of silver, and two and a quarter tons of bronze. It was not an inexpensive structure!"\(^5\)