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219 - The Lampstand

1. Introduction

Recognized the world over, the Menorah is a symbol of Judaism, faith and strength. Its design is modeled after a lamp created to provide light inside the Tabernacle that was constructed at Sinai under God's direction and inspiration. This object is filled with figurative connections and conveys them in a subtle and silent manner. In this lesson we'll take a look at **The Lampstand** from a practical, spiritual and figurative perspective.

2. Light in the Holy Place

Descriptions of the Tabernacle as given in Exodus don't include vents or windows for the structure. Modern artistic renderings of the Tabernacle interpret it as a tent and provide open areas in the top of the canopy that would allow smoke out and daylight in. As we'll see when we discuss the Tabernacle itself, these interpretations aren't correct. The Tabernacle wasn't a tent in spite of having some similarities to one. On the contrary, it was a rigid structure holding enormous hangings, curtains and solid walls and didn't appear to have any openings other than the entrance. The density of the walls and coverings would render the inside of the Tabernacle as dark as night and create the need for a light source; the Lampstand.

The King James Version refers to the Lampstand as the "**candlestick**" which might convey the idea of a feeble wick limited in its ability to provide illumination. As we examine the Lampstand we'll see that it, like other objects in the Tabernacle, was a majestic work of art that conveyed a sense of power while being functional at the same time. In this lesson we'll take a look at the:

- a. Construction of the Lampstand
- b. Placement of the lampstand in the Tabernacle
- c. Usage of the Lampstand
- d. Figurative aspects of the lampstand

Let's take a look at each of these.

3. Construction of the Lampstand

At Sinai God commanded Moses to make a lampstand that would be placed in the Tabernacle. "*And thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold: of beaten work shall the candlestick be made, even its base, and its shaft; its cups, its knops, and its flowers, shall be of one piece with it. And there shall be six branches going out of the sides thereof; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side thereof, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side thereof: three cups made like almond-blossoms in one branch, a knop*

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and a flower; and three cups made like almond-blossoms in the other branch, a knop and a flower: so for the six branches going out of the candlestick: and in the candlestick four cups made like almond-blossoms, the knops thereof, and the flowers thereof; and a knop under two branches of one piece with it, and a knop under two branches of one piece with it, and a knop under two branches of one piece with it, for the six branches going out of the candlestick. Their knops and their branches shall be of one piece with it; the whole of it one beaten work of pure gold. And thou shalt make the lamps thereof, seven: and they shall light the lamps thereof, to give light over against it. And the snuffers thereof, and the snuffdishes thereof, shall be of pure gold. Of a talent of pure gold shall it be made, with all these vessels. And see that thou make them after their pattern, which hath been showed thee in the mount.” (Ex 25.31-40).

There are some unique characteristics in this description. First, there are no dimensions stated. The Lord provides a description that would allow us to form an idea of what the lampstand looked like but without specific measurements we can only speculate about its size. In the King James Version as well as the American Standard quoted here, the term knop appears and may be a bit vague in our time. The word refers to a round ornamental area that segments the branches of the arms of the lamp. Some modern translations use the word “calyx” which is a term referring to a structure in plants, particularly flowers. This structure is described as being composed of leaves in a spiral formation that appears before a flower completely forms. The term is also used for the base of rose blossom which is round and remains after the petals have fallen away. Both words refer to a round bowl shaped structure that appears to have defined segments of the lampstand. A floral design appears to be evident in the lampstand as the branches are described as being like almond blossoms.

Another interesting aspect of the lampstand is that the lamps themselves appear to be made separately then attached to the branches and the central column of the lampstand. According to the description the entire lampstand was made from gold plates that were hammered into shape and smoothed together. The seven lamps were then fitted to the top of the six branches and the central column of the lampstand. Oil burned as fuel would have to be placed directly in the lamps.

Finally there is no mention of a base the lampstand sits on. We don't know if it had feet or a wide base at the bottom that supported the weight of the branches. None of this is included in the initial description, nor is it included in the record of its creation by Bezaleel (Ex 37.17-24). This is very interesting considering the amount of information recorded regarding other objects that were made such as the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat. The lack of a complete description might lead one to think that the lampstand didn't have the status of the other objects in the Tabernacle. We'll discuss this in more depth as we develop the study.

What we can say about the lampstand is that it was a priceless object made entirely of

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gold. The placement of the lampstand in the Tabernacle may give more detail concerning the size of the object.

4. Placement of the Lampstand in the Tabernacle

The initial description of the lampstand doesn't provide a clear description of where it was to be placed. Later as the Tabernacle is setup more detail is provided. "***And he put the candlestick in the tent of the congregation, over against the table, on the side of the tabernacle southward. And he lighted the lamps before the Lord; as the Lord commanded Moses.***" (Ex 40.24). The Tabernacle was to be aligned so that the entrance faced the East. Inside the Holy Place the lampstand was placed on the South side. There's an additional phrase that helps define its position.

The table of shewbread, or, bread of the presence was to be placed on the North side of the Holy Place in front of the veil. The description from these passages states that the lampstand was on the South side "***over against the table***" indicating it was in line with the table of shewbread along the opposite wall and would therefore be able to provide light for the entire area. When we discuss the Tabernacle we'll review the structural arrangement and placement of these objects but for now we can get an idea of where the lampstand was.

Based on these descriptions it seems logical to think that the lampstand was tall enough and the lamps large enough to stand on its own. There's no mention of placing it on another table and there's no indication a table was created for it. In that case the lampstand may have been the height and size of what we see today in a floor lamp. The branches would have been equally spaced providing balance on each side of the column where the central lamp rested. Its height would also be manageable by the priest who would need to use the snuffers and other equipment to trim the flame as well as add oil to the lamps. This leads us to an examination of how the lampstand was used.

5. Usage of the Lampstand

From descriptions in the commands to make the lampstand and its placement it seems that the primary function is to provide light. The Tabernacle was probably dark inside and so there was a practical need for a source of illumination. The position directly opposite the table of shewbread representing God's presence with the Hebrews, emphasizes the importance of the bread and the lampstand as well. Both objects were in front of the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Instructions for lighting and maintaining the lamp are given as well.

God states, "***Without the veil of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning before the Lord continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick***"

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before the Lord continually.” (Lev 24.3-4). The wording here is a bit confusing concerning the burning of the lamps. God states the lamps are to be ordered “...*from the evening unto the morning*” which might imply they were only to burn at night. There are two things to be considered that will clarify this.

First the phrase “*from the evening unto the morning*” is similar to phrases found in Genesis. Each day of creation is described as “the evening and the morning” indicating a full twenty-four hour period. The phrase as it appears here indicates a daily regularity. The second statement that clarifies this is in the command that the light is to burn always. This phrase appears in connection with the oil that is to be used for the lamps. God commands, “*And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always. In the tabernacle of the congregation without the vail, which is before the testimony...*” (Ex 27.20). This specifies that the lamps are to be burning continually and the statement that Aaron and his sons are to “*order*” the lamps “*from the evening unto the morning*” indicates that the maintenance of the lamps was to be performed daily so they wouldn’t go out.

The instructions for the oil to be used in the lampstand are also somewhat unique in the way they’re worded. The lampstand has been described as being very ornate, made of pure gold and was to be placed next to the vail concealing the Most Holy Place. Some details such as the size and base are absent so we have no idea what it really looked like. To some degree there’s a certain amount of obscurity attached to the lamp which is ironic since it is to illuminate the bread symbolizing God’s presence with the people and lit the way into the Most Holy Place where the priest had direct access to God. The oil is presented as an integral element but somewhat unattached and connected by means of its overall function. Of all the objects in the Tabernacle, the lampstand and the oil are two that remain somewhat enigmatic in their presentation.

A number of methods were used to extract oil from olives with each method resulting in a different grade or purity of the oil. In the instructions for olive oil used for the lampstand is a Hebrew word describing the process of breaking or beating young olives in pieces. This utilized young olives described as the firstfruit of the olive. This method of extracting oil from the olives appears to have yielded a smaller amount of oil but the quality was higher being described as “*pure*” beaten olive oil. The process and image we can gather from this is that the highest quality oil would be used in the Tabernacle. It appears that this oil would have been more valuable due to its quality and lesser amount produced. Olive oil produced in this manner would burn cleaner as well which is an interesting detail considering the closed nature of the Tabernacle.

This description of the olive oil is consistent with the standards prescribed by God for all of the items in the Tabernacle and the materials they were made of. These descriptions and instructions, as well as a subtle lack of some details that are given for other items in the Tabernacle, can be seen in an examination of the figurative connections formed by the lampstand

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and the olive oil that burned to create the light.

6. Figurative aspects of the Lampstand

Figurative connections between some objects in the Tabernacle and their spiritual counterparts are more obvious while others, like the lampstand, are more subtle. Examining the lampstand as a figure the connections exist between its function and design and not so much the physical object itself. Some of these are more evident than others and we have to take care not to create a symbolic attachment that doesn't exist.

The first thing that stands out is that the lampstand is to light the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle as a whole represented the presence of God with the people and within its design is a successive layering that approaches the single point where God manifested himself. We'll take a look at the construction of the Tabernacle in another lesson, but for now I'll note that it was a large enclosed structure without windows. The interior of the Tabernacle would be very dark and in order for the priests to perform their duties they needed to see. From a practical standpoint the lampstand was a means to supply the necessary illumination.

In previous lessons I've discussed the presence of light in creation which God made on the first day. John also tells us that light represents God himself. John states, "***This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.***" (1 John 1.5). Paul describes God's dwelling in similar terms in his writing to Timothy. Speaking of God, Paul states, "***Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting.***" (1 Tim 6.16).

Another figure that emerges is that of the word of God and light. The psalmist writes, "***The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.***" (Psm 119.130). God's word is also compared to a lamp that guides us. The Psalmist writes, "***Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.***" (Psm 119.105). We understand the word of God to be a spiritual guide to be pleasing to the Lord and in the placement of the lampstand we have a figure of a light illuminating the way to God's presence.

In an earlier lesson I discussed the numbers used by God to represent spiritual realities. One of those was the number seven and we see that present in the scriptures from the beginning. Creation included seven days with the last day being a day sanctified by God as a day of rest in which he had completed his work and rested from it. The number seven appears throughout the scriptures representing the direct action and work of the Lord. It represents completeness, fulfillment and the authority of God. Noah was told to take his family into the ark seven days before the flood began and clean animals sent to the patriarch were sent in sevens (**Gen 7.1-3**).

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The famine on the land of Egypt during the days of Joseph lasted for seven years following seven years of plenty. The appearance of the number seven continues throughout the scriptures and we see this repeated in the lampstand.

There were a total of seven lamps in the lampstand attached to six branches extending from its side and one at the center. The lampstand was placed next to the vail which has significant spiritual significance and was on the opposite side of the table of shewbread that represented the presence of God with the people. Within these images is the suggestion of close proximity to the Lord, the abiding care God gave his people and only separated from where God manifested by a very short space.

Another figure found in the lampstand points directly to the Messiah. Isaiah, speaking of the Messiah, describes his attributes. *“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord..”* (Isa 11.1-2). In the book of Revelation Christ is described as the one who has the *“seven spirits of God”* (Rev 3.1). Isaiah identifies these for us and we can list them. The Messiah would have the spirit of ...

- a. The Lord
- b. Wisdom
- c. Understanding
- d. Counsel
- e. Might
- f. Knowledge
- g. The fear of the Lord

Let's take a closer look at each of these and then we'll complete the connection to the lampstand.

a. **Spirit of the Lord** - John was asked by his followers if he was the Messiah. John explained that he had come to prepare the way for him but his work would fade and he would be taken out of the way (**John 3.25-30**). John explained that there was a difference between the work that he did and what the Messiah would accomplish and gave the reason why. John states, *“For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.”* (**John 3.34**). Christ's power was without limit in the world as shown in the miracles he performed. This testified to the fact that the spirit of God was with him as he fulfilled the work of the Father.

b. **Wisdom** - Christ was brought into the world by a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

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A body was created in the womb of Mary and the spirit of the son of God was sent from the Father to be born in the likeness of humanity. Christ from his early years exhibited the wisdom of God in his earthly ministry. At the age of twelve, Jesus was separated from his parents after a trip to Jerusalem. After three days they found him in the temple listening to and asking the doctors of the Law questions. When asked why he was doing this Jesus answered, “***How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?***” (Lk 2.49). As the chapter ends we're told “***And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.***” (Lk 2.52). When the scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign Jesus rebuked them for their unbelief stating, “***The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.***” (Matt 12.42). Throughout the Gospel accounts we have a number of examples of Christ's confounding attempts to entrap him. We also see that he spoke the word of God in a way that the people recognized was different from the religious leaders of the day. The wisdom of God was demonstrated by Christ in his words, actions and miracles he performed.

c. **Understanding** - Throughout the Gospel accounts of Christ's time on Earth we see his wisdom and understanding revealed on many occasions. Jesus understood the intent of those who sought to trap him, the pain of those who grieved or suffered physically and he knew how to answer those who tried to trap him. Luke provides a summary of how those who heard him reacted. “***And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.***” (Luke 2.47).

d. **Counsel** - Christ came into the world to bring the final revelation from God to man. Zechariah describes this in a figurative prophecy concerning the Messiah. “***Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The Branch; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord: Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both***” (Zech 6.12-13). Christ also stated, “***I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.***” (John 14.6). The way to the Father was made clear by Christ, the Messiah, who came to deliver the word, offer himself as a sacrifice and provide counsel directing those who will listen to eternal life.

e. **Might** - Christ's presence, power and self control are well illustrated in the scriptures. The true strength he possessed was in the fact that he was the son of God, the Messiah, and is the only way that anyone can be saved. He has the ability to save those from death who will follow him and has provided the means to do that. The writer of Hebrews states, “***Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;***

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And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (Heb 2.14-15). Christ’s existence in the world, his miracles and the word he spoke were a testament to the power and might of God himself.

f. **Knowledge** - In his Gospel account, John introduces Christ as the word of God who was coexistent with the Father and who came into the world to be a light to mankind so we could be reconciled to the Lord. (**John 1.1**) The word that Christ brought into the world originated with the Father and so he represents the only true and accurate knowledge that will unite us with God. On the night in which he was betrayed, Christ prayed for his disciples. *“For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.” (John 17.8).* The only path to understanding the will of the Father lies in the word that began with Christ and later continued through the work of the Holy Spirit. In this way Christ truly is the light of the world and is the only path to reach Jehovah.

g. **Fear of the Lord** - Throughout his earthly ministry Christ directed his reverence and respect to his Father who sent him. He serves as an example of the attitude that we need to have toward God which serves two functions. First, its an expression of respect and gratitude to God for the blessings he provides us with and for the relationship we have with him. Secondly, it’s a statement of ultimate power. Christ warned his disciples of things that would befall them later on and encouraged them to have confidence in the power of God. Christ states, *“And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.” (Luke 12.4-5).* In his first epistle John encourages Christians to resist and overcome the world because *“greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world”* showing the contrast between the power of God and the power of Satan (**1 John 4.4**). God is powerful and able to strengthen his followers as he performed his will in the world through his son.

The symbolism of seven lamps on the lampstand, the seven spirits of God, the revelation of the word and fulfilled prophecy through Christ are profound connections subtly contained in the lampstand. The lampstand is placed near the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place foreshadowing a time when it would be clear how we could be reconciled with the Father.

A more indirect image is also present in the fuel burned to create the light in the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle represented the place where God manifested his presence as a reminder that he was with the people. Within the Tabernacle a light was fueled by olive oil that was to be pure and of the highest quality. This fuel to some degree is a shadow of the work of the Holy Spirit who delivered the word and inspired writers to record it. In the writings of the

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prophets there are images of olive oil that demonstrate this connection.

Speaking of the coming of the Messiah, Zechariah records his visions that incorporate these elements. *“And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top thereof: And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side thereof... Then answered I, and said unto him, What are these two olive trees upon the right side of the candlestick and upon the left side thereof? And I answered again, and said unto him, What be these two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden oil out of themselves? And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these be? And I said, No, my lord. Then said he, These are the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”* (Zech 4.1-3, 11-14).

In this image we see a lampstand or “*candlestick*” with seven lamps accompanied by two olive trees whose oil is fueling the lamps. The angel refers to these as the “*anointed ones*” that stand by the Lord. This image is clearly a parallel to the lampstand in the Tabernacle. The text indicates that the oil from the olive trees flows directly from the source and fuels the pure light. All of this creates an image of a powerful witness to the work of God. The book goes on to detail the judgment of God and the coming of the Messiah as a judgment and restoration of faith in the family of mankind.

The lampstand remains an enigmatic figure that silently invokes images of the presence and revelation of God. It was made of pure gold, was to be fueled by pure olive oil and gave light in a place where the priests served and communed with God. Its light fell on the unleavened bread representing the presence of the people before the Lord and was to burn continually.

7. Next

In the next lesson we’ll discuss the structure where the lampstand, Ark of the Covenant and other objects were placed. Some have an idea this was just a mobile tent carried through the desert but what we find is something completely different. Join me in the next video for a discussion of **The Tabernacle**.