

In preparation for the Tabernacle display at Scentsy Commons, the Meridian Idaho North Stake Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints requested that several members of the Stake write research papers on various subjects relating to the ancient Tabernacle revealed to Moses in the Old Testament. The authors of these nine papers are not Bible scholars, but spent significant time, effort, and prayer as they studied their subjects and honed their messages. Their hope was to provide meaningful information for readers of all faiths and backgrounds who want to gain a deeper understanding of the doctrine and symbolism of Jesus Christ surrounding the Tabernacle. The authors' intent was for the writings to be from a Christian perspective, yet free from bias towards any one Christian religion. Further, the facts and opinions represented in these papers are the work of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the doctrine and teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or its leaders.

We welcome your questions or feedback on how we can improve the content of these research papers:
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Table of Showbread, Lampstand (Menorah), and Ark of the Covenant - Executive Summary

By Monte Moore

- **Table of Showbread** Showbread translates to “bread of the face”, or “presence bread” (Strong).
 - Made of acacia wood, covered with gold (Ex. 25:23-30), positioned along the north wall of the Holy Place (Ex. 40:22).
 - Twelve loaves of bread were placed on the table (Lev. 24:5-9) with dishes, bowls, coverings, and spoons of gold (Ex. 25:29).
 - Symbolism of “bread” (see “Symbols of Water, Oil, Incense and Bread” paper within this compilation).
 - Bread constituted from 50 to 70% of ancient Israel’s daily caloric intake (Marks; Hareuveni).
 - Jesus is “the bread of life” (John 6:31-35, 48-51).
 - Jesus (our daily nourishment) exemplifies the Father (John 8:28-29; 12:49; 14:31).
 - Old Testament, New Testament, and current concepts of covenant meal with God (Lev. 24:9).
 - The twelve showbread were eaten weekly by the priests.
 - Last supper (Matt. 26:26-28) and sacrament are also covenant meals (1 Cor. 11:24-25). This “new” covenant was prophesied by Jeremiah the prophet (Jer. 31:31-34).
 - Partaking of the bread and drink of the sacrament provides a regular opportunity to renew our commitment to take upon us His name that he may fulfill in us the promises set forth by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34).
- **Golden Lampstand**
 - Made of solid gold, positioned along the south wall of the Holy Place (Ex. 40:24). The only source of light in the Holy Place. The central stem branched into seven almond tree branches or “candlesticks” which continuously burned pure olive oil (Ex. 25:31-40; Lev. 24:1-4).
 - The lampstand symbolizes Jesus Christ
 - Light: *Jesus is the true light of the world that shines in the darkness and enlightens man* (John 1:3-4; 1:9; 8:12).
 - The almond tree, which appears to be dead in the winter is first to display its blossoms in early spring. This is symbolic of Jesus, who was the first fruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20). Jesus is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).
 - Number seven signifies abundance or completeness in Hebrew, referring to the unfailing love and saving power of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:39).
 - Olive Oil is symbolic of Jesus Christ (see “Symbols of Water, Oil, Incense and Bread” paper within this compilation).
- **Ark of the Covenant**
 - The only item in the Most Holy Place, fashioned of acacia wood and overlaid with gold (Ex. 26:31-33; 40:1-21).
 - The ark contained a jar of manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, Tablets of the Law (Heb. 9:4) and a scroll containing the law and covenant (Deut. 31:26).
 - Mercy Seat – functionally formed the lid of the ark, but was highly symbolic.
 - A pure gold slab adorned with cherubs (winged angels) attached (Ex. 25:10-22; 37-6-9).
 - Was considered to be the throne or dwelling place of God (2 Sam. 6:2; Isa. 37:16).

- The Hebrew word for mercy seat (*kapporet*) is more properly translated as “atonement piece” or “place of atonement”.
- Once each year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy Place and sprinkled the blood of atonement upon the mercy seat (Lev. 16), representing the drops of blood that would be shed by Jesus.

Table of Showbread, Lampstand (Menorah), and Ark of the Covenant

By Monte Moore

Introduction The sacred table of showbread, the lampstand or “menorah”, and the Ark of the Covenant were central fixtures of the ancient tabernacle of Moses. They served as symbolic reminders of Jesus Christ’s redeeming love, pointing the Israelites to their covenant relationship with God.

Table of Showbread The Table of Showbread was a small table made of acacia wood and overlaid with pure gold (Ex. 25:23-30). The table was positioned near the north wall of the Holy Place (Ex. 40:22). Twelve loaves of bread made of fine flour were “set in two rows, six on a row” upon the table with pure frankincense (Lev. 24:5-9). The bread was placed upon the table on the Sabbath and remained there until the following Sabbath when the old bread was consumed and replaced. Also, there was a drink offering (Ex. 25:29). Dishes, cups and pitchers of pure gold were placed upon the table (Cassuto). It is believed that the pitchers and cups were used for the purpose of distributing and consuming wine along with the bread each Sabbath day (Gane).

The translation of showbread or shewbread is the “bread of the face”, or “presence bread”. When the priests partook of the showbread, frankincense was burnt upon the altar of incense, symbolizing a communal meal with God. This act represented a perpetual covenant between God and the twelve tribes of Israel (Lev. 24:9).

In Old Testament times, covenants were formalized with a meal (for example, Ex. 24:11). “It has been noted by one scholar that Abraham’s reception of bread and wine from Melchizedek might be seen as part of an ancient Near Eastern enthronement ritual” (Widengren; Brown, Matthew). Thus, eating this meal bound the twelve tribes of Israel in a close covenant relationship with God by symbolically sharing a meal with him (Rose).

In the context of the ancient tabernacle, as well as the New Testament, “bread” is a potent symbol of Jesus Christ. In ancient Israel, bread was eaten with nearly every meal and constituted from 50 to 70% of the daily caloric intake (Marks; Hareuveni). Jesus identified himself as “the bread of life” (John 6:31-35, 48-51).

Symbolically, Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus derives its name from the Hebrew *bayit*, meaning house; and *lechem*, meaning bread or “House of Bread” (Strong).



Figure 1. Table of Showbread from: Moon, Cordell, R.



Figure 2. Diet of Ancient Israel included bread, legumes, olives, dried fruits, olive oil, honey, butter, cheese, onions, herbs, and nuts from: Moore, Monte H.

Beside bread, ancient Israel also ate dates, olives, legumes, meat, and nuts, but none of these was eaten as frequently or in the quantity that bread was eaten. Like bread for every meal, regular consumption of the teachings of Jesus opens of a flood light and truth to nourish each of our thoughts and actions and support us in our trials (also see “Symbols of Water, Oil, Incense and Bread” paper within this compilation).

At the Last Supper, “Jesus took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake *it*, and gave *it*, to his disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:26-28).

The showbread covenant meal may be likened to the sacrament, or communion, which Jesus instituted at the Last Supper, sealing His “new covenant” with His people (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:24, 25).

This “new” covenant was prophesied by Jeremiah the prophet .

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer 31:31-34).

Partaking of the bread and drink of the sacrament provides a regular opportunity to renew our commitment to take upon us His name. And as we place our faith in him every day, he will nourish us through the promises set forth by Jeremiah for us: namely, writing His law in our minds and hearts. Thus, we become His people, “knowing the Lord”, receiving forgiveness and strength in this life and hope for a joyful life with him in the world to come through the power of his atoning blood.

Lampstand

The Golden Lampstand or Menorah was placed near the south wall of the Holy Place (Ex. 40:24), opposite the table of showbread. It was made from one talent (75 pounds) of solid gold. The lampstand consisted of a base, a central shaft, and seven candles or branches, one in the center with three branches arising symmetrically on either side. The seven branches (candlesticks) of the lampstand were fashioned after almond branches, with buds and blossoms. Atop each branch was a lamp that burned pure olive oil (Ex. 25:31-40). God commanded that the lamps were to burn continuously (Lev. 24:1-4). The Menorah has been estimated to have been between forty-two and sixty inches high and about forty-two inches wide. The golden lampstand was the only source of light in the Holy Place. Jewish tradition has interpreted the lampstand to represent the tree of life and the presence of God symbolized in a burning bush (Brown, William).

Light, almond branches, buds, and blossoms, the number seven, and olive oil, all features of the golden lampstand, symbolize the tender mercies of Jesus Christ:

Light: *Jesus is the true light of the world that shines in the darkness and enlightens man* (John 1:3-4, 9; 8:12).

Almond Branches, Buds, and Blossoms. In Palestine, the almond is the first tree to display its blossoms. The Jewish holiday Tu B’Shavat is celebrated upon return of spring with eating almonds (My Jewish Learning). The Hebrew word for almond, *shaked* is related to the root word *shakid*, which signifies “to be alert, on the lookout, hasten and watch” (Strong). Hence, the almond tree is symbolic of Jesus, who was the first fruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:2). *Through his mercy, our future Eternal Life becomes possible* (John 11:25).



Figure 3. Almond Tree from Moore, Liz S



Figure 4. Almond Fruit on Moore, Liz S

Number Seven (seven candlesticks): The Hebrew word for seven derives from the Hebrew word *sh-v-a* and is related to *soba* which means fullness, wholeness, abundance, completeness; *shaba* which signifies swearing an oath (Strong). Jesus promises are always fulfilled to those who keep their promises to him. *Nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of god, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom 8:39).

Olive Oil: (see “Symbols of Water, Oil, Incense and Bread” paper within this compilation).



Figure 5. Golden Lampstand from: Moon, Cordell, R.

Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant was placed in the center of the Most Holy Place behind the veil (Ex. 26:31-33) and was the major focus of the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and later the temple (Ex. 40:1-21). The Ark was made of acacia wood and overlaid both on the inside and the outside with pure gold. Gold-covered acacia poles were permanently attached at the corners of the ark through golden rings. A decorative gold molding encircled the top of the Ark. The top of the Ark was covered with a flat slab of pure gold known as the mercy seat. Two solid gold winged cherubs were attached to the mercy seat, facing each other with heads bowed. Their wings stretched forward to cover the mercy seat (Ex. 25:10-22; 37:6-9).

The Hebrew word ark, 'aron', originates from the root word *arah*, which means to gather or pluck. Hence, the word *ark (aron)* signifies a box into which things are gathered (Strong). A jar of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, the Tablets of the Law (Heb. 9:4), as well as a scroll containing the law and covenant (Deut. 31:26) were known to reside in the Ark. The Ark of the Covenant was considered to be the throne or dwelling place of God (2 Sam. 6:2; Isa. 37:16).

The Hebrew word for mercy seat (*kapporet*) is more properly translated as "atonement piece" or "place of atonement" (Harris). Once each year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Holy Place and sprinkled the blood of atonement upon the place of atonement (Lev. 16).



Figure 6. Ark of the Covenant from Moon, Cordell, R.

It is interesting to consider the cherubim on the *kapporet*.

“Cherubim are generally regarded as guardians of sacred things....And, indeed, the scriptures speak in poetic language of Jehovah moving through the firmament “upon a cherub...upon the wings of the wind” (2 Sam. 22:11). Thus the wings of the cherubim could be seen as a symbol of the power of Israel’s King, to move among His countless dominions” (Brown, Matthew).

*The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament concludes that the slab of pure gold or cover (*kapporet*) was “the locus of God’s presence in Israel, conceived as a ‘pure plane.’ The critical feature of the *kapporet* is neither its outward form nor its precise structural description nor its position ‘above the ark,’ which appears to qualify it as a ‘cover,’ but its symbolic representation of a theological reality: the sign marking the boundary of the transcendent realm and therefore the site of God’s condescension” (Botterweck).*

Moses consecrated the Ark, once it was completed, with holy oil (Ex. 30:22-26). God commanded that only the tribe of Levi was to move the Ark (Deut. 10:8). The Ark was to be covered with animal skins and other fabrics while it was moved (Num. 4:5-6). When Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land, the Levite priests carried the Ark to the overflowing banks of the Jordan River, and as soon as their feet touched the water, the river stopped flowing *“And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan”* (Josh. 3:17). On occasion, the Ark was carried with the Israelite armies into battle (see Josh. 6:6-13).

Together the ark and the mercy seat represent the healing power that comes through the atoning sacrifice and blood of Jesus Christ. In Old Testament times the ark was secluded in the Holy Place behind the veil, where it was visited only once per year by the high priest so that blood of the sacrificial animals could be sprinkled upon the mercy seat (Lev. 16), as a symbol of the future drops of blood that would be shed for us by our savior, Jesus Christ. After Jesus suffered in the Garden of Gethsemane and upon the cross, the veil was torn from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51); symbolically making it possible for all who cared to enter in, to *“boldly approach the throne of grace”*, thanks to our *“great high priest”*, Jesus Christ (Heb. 4:14-16).

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