
Day 5 Wood and Gold

Before we begin, read: Exodus 25:10-11

Now that we've caught our breath from the first moment of encounter, let's take a look around.

The room housing the ark described in Exodus 25 holds special value to God. He doesn't just call it holy, He calls it His Holy of Holies. The decorating scheme is simple. Everything in the room is gold—from the walls to the ark to the cherubim above it. A fitting touch, because gold is generally used in Scripture to symbolize God's nature and righteousness.

Well, that just makes us feel about as out of place as raw lumber scattered on the floor of an opulent palace. An appropriate thought, it turns out, because wood is the scriptural symbol for humanity. How in the world can we ever fit in here? God leaves us a clue in the blueprints for the ark of the covenant.

Verses ten and eleven explain, "They shall make a chest of acacia wood. . . . And you shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and out you shall overlay it."

Because the ark is appointed to sit in the secret place of the Most High, we might expect God to require it be fashioned out of solid gold. But that would have described His heart as being filled with nothing but Himself. And life without man was never in His plan.

Just as the gold hides the wood's imperfections, just as it protects the wood from destruction by fire or rotting from moisture, just as it graces a simple wooden box with incredible value and purpose, God longs to likewise cover, protect and endow us with significance. In a place where there's nothing but gold, in the heart of a God who is nothing but holy, we find a home, because He clothes our nakedness and ordinariness with His glory.

*He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler.
(Psalm 91:4)*

Prayer: Lord God, thank You for covering my weaknesses and inadequacies so I could have a home inside Your beautiful heart.

Deeper Still

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-5.

Do you groan (or long) to be clothed and covered in the way Paul describes in this letter? How does it make you feel to know He has "prepared us for this very thing"? Journal your thoughts.



Day 6 Hidden in Glory

Before we begin, read Exodus 25:12-16

I find the most remarkable aspect of the ark's wood is its utter unremarkability.

God didn't instruct Moses to carve up a stately cedar of Lebanon for this special place. The ark (indeed the entire Holy of Holies) would be assembled from planks and pieces of ordinary *shittim* wood.

Shittim, an unimpressive, acacia-like plant, is a scruffy desert-dweller that looks more like a large bush than a tree. It's a defensive bit of herbage with long, imposing thorns that keep hungry wildlife at bay. Its dense heartwood resists both ax and carving knife.

Prickly and difficult as it is, though, the acacia contains the potential to spread its branches wide as it matures, like a thatch umbrella sheltering a sun-weary land. Entrusted to the hands of a master craftsman, this tough wood can even be fashioned and polished into something beautiful.

I can relate to the defensive, hard-hearted acacia. I put up my thorny fists whenever I feel either man or God coming too close for comfort. And just try and dig into my inner core and attempt to work changes if you want to know how stubborn I can be—even if those changes would make me a better person. Like the humble acacia, however, when I yield to the will of my Creator, I become capable of so much more.

TERRY MURPHY

Even the most finely polished acacia, however, can never be transformed into a golden object worthy to rest in this holy place. The wood of the tabernacle reminds us our true loveliness and value isn't based on the great stock from which we've sprung or how mature and splendid we've become. It's a bestowed glory—one that is given and wrapped around us—which actually makes us fit to be with Him.

How appropriate then, that such ordinary wood represent mankind in the tabernacle tableau. God isn't afraid of our defensiveness or iron will. He sees to it that all our ordinariness and unloveliness, is hidden under the pure gold of His glory and holiness, making a home for the imperfect within the Perfect.

He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness (Isaiah 61:10).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me believe You really want me here with you. I feel so unworthy. Help me believe that when You look at me, all You see is the beauty of imperfections are hidden from view.

Deeper Still

Read Isaiah 61:10–11.

What do you have in common with the acacia wood in the tabernacle? Can you picture yourself being covered in something so precious as gold? Isaiah speaks of being clothed and covered too. Can you believe God wants you dressed like this? Journal your thoughts.

Day 7 Fit for a Banquet

Before we begin, read: Exodus 25:23-30

From the innermost room, our Host turns our attention to a space just outside the Holy of Holies in order to describe the second piece of furniture in His tent—a table.

Not just any dining table, though. Built of acacia wrapped in gold, the table of showbread echoes the theme of Emmanuel (God with us) that the ark began. (See “Wood and Gold” on Day 5 and “Hidden in Glory” on Day 6 if you need to review.)

Here conversation deepens to communion, because any table talk will be between God and us. How striking that after the major emphasis on God's holiness and our connection to it, He points us to a symbol of conversation, family, and supply. The awesome King and Judge of the universe invites us to linger with Him the way a father might want to hang around the dinner table with his kids.

The meal on the table is measured with a dose of extravagance detailed in Leviticus 24:5-6. “Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an *ephah* a for each loaf. Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD” (NIV).

Just how much bread does that make? Two-tenths of an *ephah* of flour translates to about four quarts. Four quarts of flour works out to at least four and a half pounds per loaf. Add to that the weight of any liquid ingredients and you can see this is no sprinkling of

breadcrumbs. With twelve of these loaves, we're talking about over fifty pounds of bread resting on the golden surface. Once more, the ordinary rubs shoulders with the extraordinary. Bread on gold. Gold on wood. Everywhere we look, God shows Himself abiding close to man.

These loaves are variously translated as the bread of the Presence, the bread of faces and the continual bread. Authorities differ on whether they were stacked or spread across the surface, but all agree these twelve loaves represented the whole family of Israel continually present before the face of God.

Upright or laid out flat, the many loaves remind me of a wall—a wall of faces looking out from the family table toward their Father at the head. Each brick in this metaphorical wall of bread is exactly the same in size and quality, and each carries the same weight of importance. It doesn't matter whether the tribe it represents is proportionally large or small, strong or weak.

Just like the bread, whether we're rich or poor, powerful or powerless, each of us can find a continual and equally memorable resting place in His presence and before His face. Here we find the reassurance we need that He not only desires to nourish and sustain us, but to fellowship with us as a family.

*See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me
(Isaiah 49:16).*

Prayer: Heavenly Father, the things that pertain to me seem insignificant compared to all that must occupy Your attention in the world. Yet You've etched a spot for me in Your immeasurable palm and keep watch over what matters to me. Emmanuel, as You look in my direction and draw near to me, I lift my face and return Your gaze as I stumble ever closer to You.

Deeper Still

Read Psalm 145:14–21.

“The LORD is near to all.” Can you picture your loaf on a level with everyone else’s on God’s table? What does it mean to know God is as close to you as He is to the greatest saint who ever lived? Journal your thoughts.



Day 8 Let There Be Light

Before we begin, read Exodus 25:31–40

After taking in the abundance displayed on the table, after marveling at the repeated theme of God’s desire to be constantly near us, we blink a moment and realize something. We’ve been deep within a dark tent and yet we’ve been able to see everything around us. Let’s turn around to see the light source across the room from the table.

The pure gold lampstand (or menorah) we’re looking at resembles a tree, complete with stems, cups, calyxes and flowers. Six branches rise from a central trunk, which forms a seventh lamp or light. It isn’t made of wood covered in gold like the rest of the furniture. It’s pure gold, beaten into shape by a master craftsman.

Just gold? God without man? What happened to the symbol of Emmanuel (God with us) we saw in the other pieces of tabernacle furniture? It’s in the detail. God uses the language of trees—stems, branches, flowers—to describe the form of the lampstand. Once more we find God marrying wood with gold.

Six branches reach for heaven on the lampstand, but it is the seventh one—driven like a spike through their center—that holds them together and raises them high. Hammered into one piece, these seven flaming branches combine their candlepower to flood the holy place with light.

Where are we in this beautiful picture? Because human beings were created on the sixth day of creation, six is often considered as the

scriptural number for mankind. The side branches of the lampstand—numbered separately from the central stalk and proceeding from it—seem to suggest a connection to us. Like them, we have no power to raise our heads before the face of God unless we are grafted into someone holy enough to stand upright in His presence—someone strong enough to hold others up as well.

In Isaiah 11:1 and other prophetic passages, God would promise to one day send a Savior called the “Branch.” Secured to His shoulders as to the central shaft of the lampstand, we have access to the face of God. It is He who lifts our lights and helps us shine.

Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you (Isaiah 46:4).

Prayer: Jesus, help me cling to You. Make my attachment to You as solid as the arms of the menorah are to the central branch. Lift me up and let my light shine brightly next to Yours.

Deeper Still

Read John 15:1–8.

Jesus indicates both fruitfulness and life itself result from being securely attached to Him. Have you ever experienced a sense of uselessness or deadness when your lifestyle has carried you away from Him? Journal your thoughts.



Day 9 A Canopy of Protection

Before we begin, read: Exodus 26:1-3

After describing the lampstand, you might think God would next direct our attention to the final piece of furniture for the holy place. But He doesn't. He begins to lay out the pattern of the curtains that cover the tabernacle.

At floor level, the color scheme has been pretty much monochromatic—gold. Now we look up to see God paint with a riot of color.

“Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine woven linen and blue, purple, and scarlet thread; with artistic designs of cherubim you shall weave them” (verse 1).

In the golden glow of the lampstand, we see angels flying over our heads. Bold threads of blue and scarlet and purple slide in and out of gleaming white linen, defining the shapes of cherubim and feathering their wings. All of this weaves a portrait of God's promise to watch over us. “He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge.... For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways” (Psalm 91:4, 11).

More amazing, this tapestry, when stitched and clasped together, will extend beyond what we can see.

TERRY MURPHY

There's enough fabric to completely cover the walls (which will be described later). From inside the holy place, however, we see only a third of its beauty—the part that's directly overhead. The remainder of the curtain falls outside the golden walls. We see the cherubim above, but not those surrounding us, even though they're here.

God doesn't just cover us from above. He continues the meticulous weaving throughout the curtain, even where it will rarely be seen. Like the curtains, His protection surrounds and covers us from every angle.

Creation sends the same message. The sun is still there when the sky fills with clouds. The ground hasn't gone anywhere when snow hides it. The wind still blows though we can't feel it from inside a house. All these things testify that we see only in part.

When we can't see, when we can't feel, the tabernacle reminds us God is still here, still with us. He not only covers, but also surrounds us. Never will He leave or forsake us.

“For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous; with favor You will surround him as with a shield” (Psalm 5:12).

Prayer: Oh Father, help me believe when I can't see. Help me remember Your protection is always around me the way the curtain always surrounds the tabernacle.

Deeper Still

Read Psalm 125.

The psalmist writes of God's protection acting like a ring of mountains around us. Curtains, shields, mountains. Which picture reassures you most? Journal your thoughts.

