



HALAKHA

12:2 Rosh Hodesh

This verse introduces the importance of the New Moon, or Rosh Hodesh. The Jewish calendar is unusual because it combines both the monthly lunar cycle and the annual solar cycle. The Sages saw this verse as having unique significance because it is the first commandment given by God to the Israelites as a people.

The Sages derived from the wording of “the beginning of months” that Nisan, the first month of the Hebrew calendar, must always fall in the spring. The Hebrew months are based on lunar months; a lunar year is shorter than a solar year by eleven days. Without a correction, the months would fall earlier from year to year. To make sure that Nisan always occurs in the spring, the Sages adjusted the calendar to match the longer, annual solar cycle, by adding an additional month in seven of each nineteen years cycle, where each “leap year” has thirteen months.

The New Moon is sanctified by the people each month, “this month shall be to you,” in contrast to the Sabbath, which is sanctified by God, “and God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” (Gen. 2:3). Initially the court in Jerusalem sanctified each new month and determined leap years based on witness testimony. During the Second Temple period the Sages fixed the Jewish calendar with predetermined leap years and Rosh Hodesh dates. ■ Ed.



New moon setting
over the horizon



ARCHAEOLOGY

13:16-19 Tefillin in archaeology

Among the thousands of written scroll fragments discovered in the Dead Sea area, archaeologists at Qumran found several scrolls that are actually tefillin, “phylacteries,” dating from the time of the Second Temple. Most of the parchments that were found were either separate fragments or were embedded in crushed phylacteries boxes.

Scholars extracted parchments from some of the boxes, which had not been opened by the archaeologists when they found them. These parchments were carefully

כָּל־פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם הַזִּכָּרִים וְכָל־בְּכוֹר בְּנֵי אִפְדָּה: וְהָיָה לְאוֹת טו • •
עַל־יָדְכָה וּלְטוֹטָפֶת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ בִּי בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ ה'

firstborn animal to the LORD, and redeem all my firstborn

• • 16 sons.’ “It shall be a sign on your arm and an emblem between your eyes – with a mighty hand the LORD rescued us from

unrolled by experts who had experience taking apart Egyptian papyri.

In addition to the phylacteries scrolls found in Qumran, two sets of phylacteries from the time of Bar Kokhba (132–135 CE) were discovered in caves in the Judean Desert. Each of the two represents a different tradition, regarding the order of the texts in the phylacteries – known as the



HALAKHA

13:16-19 Tefillin in halakha

The commandment to wear tefillin – or in English, “phylacteries,” from an ancient Greek word meaning “amulet” – is based on verses 16 and 19 here, and on verses 6:8 and 11:18 in Deuteronomy. The commandment is observed by means of two small boxes containing Torah passages written on pieces of parchment; leather bands connect the boxes to the wearer’s body. One box is worn on the forehead, between the eyes; and one is tied to the arm, on the inside of the upper arm muscle – opposite the wearer’s heart. Although early sages wore tefillin all day, the modern practice is to wear them only during the morning prayer service. ■ Ed.



➤
Tefillin
discovered at
Qumran

traditions of Rashi and Rabbenu Tam. Both of the phylacteries that were found included texts from Exodus 12:43-13:16, but one has an additional verse – the verse about honoring parents from the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:11).

The phylacteries found in Qumran are the earliest examples we have of ritual objects used in daily prayer. In fact, the Qumran scrolls are two thousand years old. A Jewish community – thought to be the Essenes – existed in Qumran from the 2nd century BCE until the 1st century CE. This is the community believed to have used the scrolls found in the area. The settlement was destroyed during the Great Revolt of 66–70 CE against the Romans. ■ Ed.



➤ Modern-day tefillin



EGYPTOLOGY

14:21 The legend of King Snofru

This verse depicts God's final miraculous deed within Egyptian borders. It was a miracle that needed to prove God's might to the Egyptians (Ex. 14:18). It needed to save the Israelites from the Egyptians, but no less, it needed to erase any doubts the Israelites may have had in God and in Moshe (Ex. 14:31). The parting of the sea was done with the aid of the east wind which is known to fiercely blow in Egypt and the southern Levant in springtime, between April and June.

An Egyptian legend from the time of the Second Intermediate period (1650–1550 BCE) has certain parallels with the story of the parting of the sea. It tells about King Snofru, the founder of the Fourth Dynasty (2613–2589 BCE). According to the legend, the king, who was feeling sad, called upon his chief lector priest for advice (see "Competition with staffs and snakes" on page 23). The chief lector priest suggested that the king go down to the water and have a group of twenty very young, minimally dressed, attractive women row a boat in front of him. The king did this, and his mood lifted. Suddenly, the head rower stopped rowing because her pendant fell into the water. The king again called his chief lector priest, who split the water in half. The pendant was found and returned to its owner, and the women continued to row.



Relief of King Snofru

יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּלֶךְ מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיֵּסַע עַמּוּד הָעָנָן מִפְּנֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲמֵד
מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם: וַיָּבֹא בֵּין ׀ מִחֲנֶה מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין מִחֲנֶה יִשְׂרָאֵל ׀
וַיְהִי הָעָנָן וַהֲחֹשֶׁךְ וַיֹּאדָר אֶת־הַלַּיְלָה וְלֹא־קָרַב זֶה אֶל־זֶה
כֹּל־הַלַּיְלָה: וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיֵּלֶךְ ה' ׀ אֶת־
הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קָדִים עֹזָה כֹּל־הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּשָּׁם אֶת־הַיָּם לַחֲרֻבָּה
וַיִּבָּקְעוּ הַמַּיִם: וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיּוֹם וַהֲמַיִם

the column of cloud moved from in front of them to their
20 rear. It came between the Egyptian and Israelite camps, as
cloud and darkness for one, but lighting the night for the
• 21 other, keeping the two apart all night. Then Moshe stretched
out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back
by a strong east wind all night, turning it to dry land and
22 dividing the waters. So the Israelites walked through the

In order to convince both Egyptians and doubtful Israelites alike, God performed the greatest miracle which demonstrated His might, and enabled the Israelites to leave Egypt and start their new phase in becoming a nation. The connection between the Egyptian legend about King Snofru and the parting of the sea performed by God cannot be ascertained, especially since many elements in the two stories are different. Yet, in both sto-

ries a dry land was created unnaturally in the midst of a body of water, which then returned back to the way it had been before. It is possible that the motif of parting the water was culturally embedded within the Egyptian mind, and when performed as a majestic miracle by God, it was understood by the Egyptians as the ultimate manifestation of God's supremacy over the Egyptian realm of magic and magicians.

▪ RSH





GEOGRAPHY

15:22 Shur Desert, toward Beersheba

It appears that the Shur Desert mentioned here refers to the region of northern Sinai, east of Egypt and south of the Mediterranean coast, and east of the Isthmus of Suez.

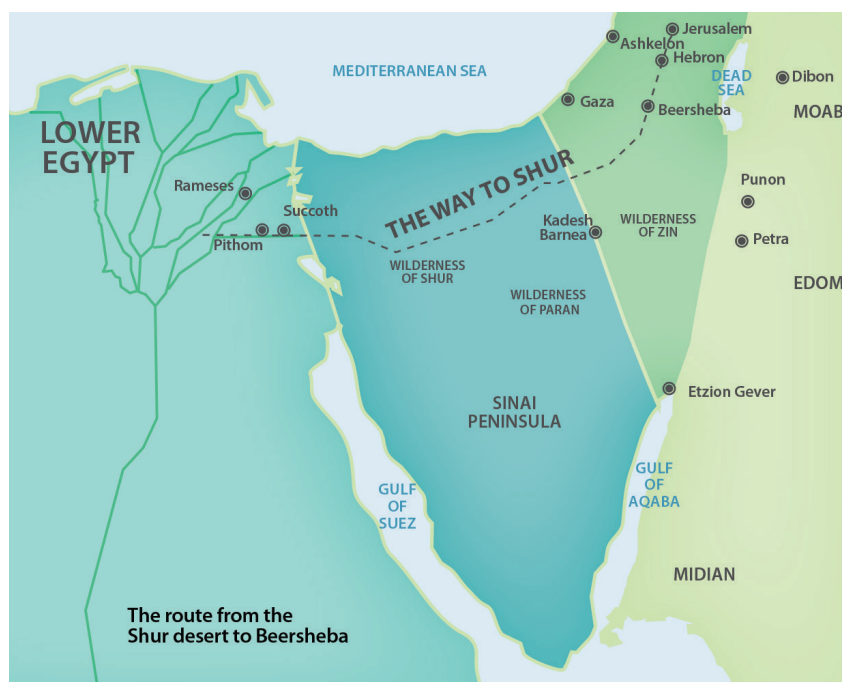
The expression “the Way to Shur” (Gen. 16:7) seems to refer to the route leading west from the region of Beersheba toward Nitsana (Auja el-Hafir) and then westward through the north-central part of the Sinai toward the Shur Desert.

The main route across the desert would have been a relatively straight, level journey from the Isthmus of Suez, to Beersheba, an approximately 180-kilometer trek that would take around a week on foot. Perhaps the Egyptian fortresses in the area of the Isthmus of Suez, which runs from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Suez, suggested the name Shur, ancient Hebrew for wall, for this region. ■ IBZ

- • • לה' כִּי־גָאֹה גָאָה סוֹם וְדָבָו דָּמָה בַּיָּם: וַיִּסַּע כִּב •
 מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּם־סוּף וַיֵּצֵאוּ אֶל־מִדְבַּר־שׁוּר וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת
 יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְלֹא־מָצְאוּ מַיִם: וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְּתָה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לִשְׁתֹּת כִּב •
 מִיַּם מַמְדֵּה כִּי מָדִים הֵם עַל־כֵּן קָרָא־שְׁמָהּ מָדָה: וַיִּלְגְּנוּ כִד •
 הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה לֵּאמֹר מַה־נִּשְׁתָּה: וַיַּעַק אֶל־ה' וַיֹּרְהוּ כה •
 ה' עֵץ וַיִּשְׁלַךְ אֶל־הַמַּיִם וַיִּמָּתְקוּ הַמַּיִם שָׁם שָׁם לֹא חָק
 וּמִשְׁפָּט וְשָׁם נִסָּהוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶס־שְׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל יְה' כו •

song; Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed in glory; horse

- • • 22 and horseman He hurled into the sea. Moshe
 then led the Israelites from the Sea of Reeds out into the
 desert of Shur. For three days, they journeyed across the
 • • • 23 desert without finding water. Eventually they came to Mara,
 but they could not drink the water there because it was
 24 bitter; because of this it was named Mara. The people railed
 25 against Moshe – “What are we to drink?” Moshe cried out
 to the LORD. And the LORD showed him a piece of wood,
 which he threw into the water – and the water became
 sweet. It was there that the LORD gave His people decree
 26 and law; it was there that He put them to the test. He said,
 “If you listen faithfully to the voice of the LORD your God,
 doing what is right in His eyes, heeding His commands



Map of the route from the Shur Desert to Beersheba



➤ *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, Rembrandt, The State Hermitage Museum, 1635



NEAR EAST

15:22 Three-day journeys

A journey of three days has symbolic meaning in the Tanakh: it is perceived as the maximum distance across which people can exert influence over one another or, stated differently, it is viewed as the minimum interval required for transitioning from one state to another. For example, Yaakov situates himself a three-day journey from Lavan to separate his flocks from Lavan's so that there will be no interaction (Gen. 30:36); Avraham and Yitzhak's journey to Moriah ends on the third day (Gen. 22:4). An example of a three-day period for achieving a new status is God's

instruction to the Israelites to prepare for three days before the revelation at Sinai where they attain the status of God's holy nation (Ex. 19:10–16).

A journey of three days appears occasionally in the literatures of the ancient Near East. In Sumerian literature, for example, a period of three days distinguishes between the different phases of a journey. In one example, the goddess Inanna (called Ishtar in Akkadian) instructs her minister Nincubura to publicly announce her descent into the underworld – only after she has traversed a three-day's journey into the lower realm. Likewise, in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the central figures, Enkidu and Gilgamesh, travel a vast distance to the Cedar Forest to kill the giant Humbaba and this trek, accomplished at super-human speed, has five stages – each of which is described as a three-day journey. ■ MT



GEOGRAPHY

15:23 The bitter waters of Mara

These bitter waters that were turned sweet, as described in verse 25, have not been positively identified. Scholars have suggested several saltwater springs in the northwest Sinai near the Isthmus of Suez. The name is probably associated with the bitter lake, located in the southern part of this isthmus, which existed in ancient times, later dried up, and was subsequently flooded by the Suez Canal. James Hoffmeier has proposed two candidates for Mara: Bir el-Mura, based on the Arabic word *murr*, cognate with the Hebrew *mara*, which means "bitter," and 'Ayun Musa, which means "springs of Moshe" in Arabic. ■ IBZ



➤ 'Ayun Musa, possibly the springs of Mara

הַשִּׁבְעִי: וַיִּקְרְאוּ בֵּית־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־שְׁמוֹ מִן־וְהוּא כְּזֶרַע גֹּדֶל •
 לֶבֶן וְטַעְמוֹ כְּצִפְיַחַת בְּדָבָשׁ: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר •
 צִוָּה ה' מִלֵּא הָעֹמֶר מִמֶּנּוּ לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם לְמַעַן ו יֵרְאוּ
 אֶת־הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר הָאֵכְלֹתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּמִדְבָּר בְּהוֹצִיאִי אֶתְכֶם
 מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן קַח צִנְצָנֶת אֶחָת •
 וְתֵן־שָׁמָּה מִלֵּא־הָעֹמֶר מִן־וְהִנֵּחַ אוֹתוֹ לִפְנֵי ה' לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת
 לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: כֹּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיַּנִּיחֵהוּ אַהֲרֹן לִפְנֵי •
 הָעֵדֻת לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת: וּבֹנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָכְלוּ אֶת־הֶמֶן אַרְבַּעַיִם שָׁנָה •
 עַד־בָּאֵם אֶל־אֶרֶץ נוֹשְׁבֵת אֶת־הֶמֶן אָכְלוּ עַד־בָּאֵם אֶל־
 קֶצֶה אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן: וְהָעֹמֶר עֲשֵׂרִית הָאִיפָה הוּא: •
 לו



LANGUAGE

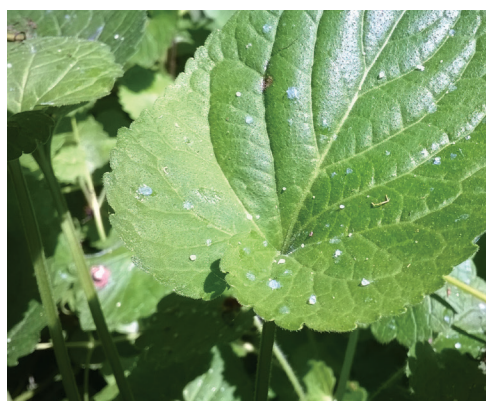
16:31 Manna (*tzapihit bidvash*)

While the word manna may be related to *mennu* – an ancient Egyptian term for food – the Torah here emphasizes the manna’s honey-sweet taste by likening it to a cooked delicacy that seems to be a baked or fried honey cake.

Surprisingly, the honeydew produced by mealybugs feeding off a resin from a species of tamarisk tree that was once relatively prevalent in the southern Sinai Peninsula is sweet and aromatic like honey. Through the turn of the 20th century, Arabs in the Sinai sold the brownish-yellow colored honeydew derived from the tamarisk. Interestingly, they called it *mann es-simma*’ meaning “manna of heaven.”

The connection between tamarisk trees and the manna mentioned by the Torah is strengthened by looking at the Arabic word *mann*, which refers to mealybugs – such as the species *Trabutina mannipara* (note *mann* in the scientific name) – which excrete a sugar-rich sticky liquid known as honeydew. The honeydew turns the color of brownish-yellow in the desert heat and is sometimes collected for human consumption.

- 31 The house of Israel named it manna. It looked like white coriander seeds, and tasted like wafers made with honey.
- 32 Moshe said, “This is what the LORD commands: Let an omer of it be kept carefully aside for your descendants, that they may see the bread I fed you in the desert when I brought you
- 33 out of Egypt.” Moshe said to Aharon, “Take an urn, put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept
- 34 for future generations.” As the LORD commanded Moshe, so Aharon placed it before the Ark of Testimony to be kept
- 35 with care. The Israelites ate manna for forty years, until they came to the land where they could settle down. They ate the
- 36 manna until they came to the border of Canaan. (An omer is a tenth of an ephah.)



◀ Tiny liquid jewels of honeydew adorn the leaves of aphid-infested plants

Note that in Asia Minor, a similar substance is produced by aphids feeding off a species of oak. Sometimes referred to as *mann es-simma*’ (or an equivalent expression in the local languages), the sweet crystalline clumps produced by the aphids are pounded and used in baked goods like the Israelites (verse 23). • MT



The goddess Ishtar holding her symbol. terracotta relief, early 2nd millennium BCE, Eshnunna

and served. The divine presence entered the image through a well-known ancient Near East magical “mouth washing” ritual, which included a purification ceremony that the polytheists believed “opened the mouth” and enabled the statue to eat, drink, speak, hear and smell.

Statues were a major focus of worship throughout the ancient Near East, beginning in Mesopotamia and Egypt around the 3rd millennium BCE. Often, a statue was carved from wood or stone and encased in gold and silver, with precious jewels representing eyes and ears. The primary role of the priests was to care for and feed these idols, and to maintain the temple and its grounds.

When a city was defeated in war, conquerors often carried away its statues to show the power of their own gods over those of the conquered city. Sometimes victors would destroy these images – the only situation in which divine images were deliberately demolished was outside of Israel.

In contrast to the pervasive ancient Near Eastern belief in polytheism and practice of idolatry, the Ten Commandments determine that God is One, that He is supernatural, eternal, and not subject to magic, and that His presence cannot be reduced to any object. They also define the exclusive loyalty of Israel to God – a loyalty that was an inherent component of the Sinai Covenant (see “Covenant in the form of Hittite suzerainty treaty” on page 105). ■ JU



NEAR EAST

20:3–5 Prohibitions against images and gods

The broad prohibitions against polytheism and idolatry, which are expressed in these verses, were unique in the ancient world.

All peoples in the ancient Near East were polytheistic. Mesopotamia had thousands of minor gods, with about twenty major deities in Babylon and forty or so others in Egypt. Each city had its own patron deity and temples abounded, each dedicated to a deity.

The concept of idolatry refers to a belief that the living presence of a god is found in a statue or image – that physical representations of deities must be worshipped



— FLORA AND FAUNA —

30:24 *Kidda*

Although there is no traditional consensus on the identity of the *kidda* plant, there is one opinion that *kidda* is a synonym for the biblical *ketzia*, which apparently is the bark of Chinese cinnamon (*Cinnamomum cassia*). Rabbi Se'adya Ga'on maintains that this is the costus plant, whose root is used as an ingredient in perfumes. ■ ZA



➤ *Cinnamomum cassia*



— MISHKAN —

30:25 *Ma'aseh roke'ah*

Ma'aseh roke'ah refers to the craft of mixing combinations of finely ground plants and spices, a method used to make the anointing oil and the incense. This method appears in the Talmud and is corroborated by Egyptian and Mesopotamian sources. ■ MM

➤ Grinding

- וקִנְיָה־בִּשְׁם חֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאֲתָיִם: וְקִדָּה חֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת בְּשֶׁקֶל כֹּד
- הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְשֶׁמֶן זֵית הָיִן: וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֹתוֹ שֶׁמֶן מִשְׁחַת־קֹדֶשׁ רֶקֶח כֹּה
- כֹּ מִרְקַחַת מַעֲשֶׂה רֶקֶח שֶׁמֶן מִשְׁחַת־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה: וּמִשְׁחַת בּו כֹ
- כֹ אֶת־אֶהָל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת אֶרֶז הָעֵדֻת: וְאֶת־הַשְּׁלֶחָן וְאֶת־כֶּל־כֹ
- כֹ כָלָיו וְאֶת־הַמִּנְדָּה וְאֶת־כֶּלֶּיָּהּ וְאֶת מִזְבֵּחַ הַקְּטֹרֶת: וְאֶת־כֹ
- כֹ מִזְבֵּחַ הָעֹלָה וְאֶת־כֶּלֶּיָּהּ וְאֶת־הַכִּיֹּר וְאֶת־כַּנּוֹ: וְקִדִּשְׁתָּ כֹ
- כֹ אֹתָם וְהָיוּ קֹדֶשׁ קְדָשִׁים כָּל־הַנִּגְעַ בָּהֶם יִקְדָּשׁ: וְאֶת־אֶהָרָן לֹ
- כֹ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו תִּמְשַׁח וְקִדִּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם לְכַהֵן לִי: וְאַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹ
- כֹ תִדְבַּר לֵאמֹר שֶׁמֶן מִשְׁחַת־קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה זֶה לִי לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: עַל־כֹ
- כֹ בֶשֶׂר אָדָם לֹא יִסֹּךְ וּבִמְתַכְּנָתוֹ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כִּמְהוּ קֹדֶשׁ הוּא
- כֹ קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם: אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִרְקַח כִּמְהוּ וְאֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן מִמֶּנּוּ לֹ

- 24 cinnamon, as well as 250 of aromatic cane, and 500 shekels of cassia – all according to the sanctuary weight – and a
- 25 hin of olive oil. Make from these a sacred anointing oil, blended as by a perfumer; it shall be a sacred anointing oil.
- 26 With it, anoint the Tent of Meeting and the Ark of the
- 27 Testimony, the table and all its utensils, the candelabrum and
- 28 its utensils, the incense altar, the sacrificial altar with all its
- 29 utensils and the basin and its base. You shall consecrate them and they will become holy of holies, and whatever touches
- 30 them will become holy. You shall anoint Aharon and his
- 31 sons and consecrate them to serve Me as priests. And you shall tell the Israelites: This shall be My sacred anointing oil
- 32 throughout the generations. Do not pour it on anyone else's body, and do not make any other oil with the same formula.
- 33 It is sacred, and shall remain sacred to you. Whoever makes perfume like it or applies it to a layperson shall be severed



לֹד עַל־זֶרַח וְנִבְרַת מֵעֲמִיּוֹ: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
 קַח־לָךְ סָמִים נָטָף וּשְׁחֵלֶת וְחִלְבֵּנָה סָמִים וְלִבְנָה זָכָה בַד
 בְּבֹד יִהְיֶה: וְעָשִׂיתָ אֹתָהּ קְטֹרֶת רֶקַח מַעֲשֵׂה רֶקַח מִמֶּלֶךְ
 טָהוֹר קָדֹשׁ: וּשְׁחַקֶּתָּ מִמֶּנָּה הָדָק וְנָתַתָּה מִמֶּנָּה לִפְנֵי הָעֵדֻת

from his people.” The LORD said to Moshe, “Take 34
 sweet spices, equal parts of stacte, onycha, galbanum and
 pure frankincense and make them into incense, blended as 35
 by a perfumer, salted, pure and sacred. Beat some of it into 36
 powder and put part of it before the covenant in the Tent



— FLORA AND FAUNA —

30:34 *Nataf* (Commiphora)

In talmudic sources, this plant has several names: *tzori*, *afarsemon*, *balsam* and *ketaf*. During the mishnaic era (1st to 3rd century CE), this plant produced the most valuable perfume in the world. It grew naturally only in the area of Judea – specifically, in Jericho and the oasis of Ein Gedi.



➤ Balsam

The Greek name of this plant is *opobalsamum*, meaning liquid perfume, a reference to the resin that trickles from it when the plant is damaged and resin is released. This name reflects the meaning of the Hebrew *nataf*, meaning “drop.”

When Jewish settlement diminished at the end of the Byzantine era, the knowledge of growing the plant and the secret of extracting *nataf* was lost and the plant was no longer grown. However, in recent years, the plant – known today as *afarsemon*, and identified with *Commiphora gileadensis* – has started to be grown again in modern-day Israel. ■ ZA



— FLORA AND FAUNA —

30:34 *Levona* (frankincense)

Frankincense (*levona*) has been positively identified with trees from the genus *Boswellia*. The certainty of the identification was possible because this tree has been continually used by many traditional societies.

The resin extracted from the tree is white. When it hardens, it becomes granular and acquires a yellowish hue.

Levona was imported along with gold along the trade routes from Sheba (Is. 60:6; Jer. 6:20). Even today, *levona* trees, known as *al-luban* in Arabic, are raised in southern Yemen and eastern Africa. ■ ZA



➤ Boswellia tree



— FLORA AND FAUNA —

30:34 *Helbena*

This refers to *Ferula galbaniflua*, a plant that grows in modern-day Iran, originally indigenous to Afghanistan and Persia. Milky white resin can be extracted from this plant. It appears that this is the source of its name, which includes the Hebrew word *halav*, meaning milk. It was used to perfume water in Mesopotamia and Egypt.

The milky resin, when it hardens, becomes yellow or green. Its odor is unpleasant and is both sharp and strong – as stated in the Talmud (*Kereitot* 6a): “For behold, *helbena* has a foul stench.” Nevertheless, when mixed with the other ingredients of the incense, *helbena* strengthens and sharpens their scent. ■ ZA



— FLORA AND FAUNA —

30:34 *Shehelet*

Talmudic sources state that this is a plant used to make perfume called *tziporen* (cloves in modern Hebrew).

There have been many suggestions as to the identity of *shehelet* such as a type of aromatic plant, but there is not enough information available to make a conclusive identification. Some ancients thought that it may have been a shellfish native to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.

Alternatively, there are ancient traditions that identify *shehelet* as the hard shell, similar to a fingernail, of certain types of snails, that contain aromatic materials. In many traditional societies, the cover of these shells, the *operculum*, is used for incense, even today. ■ ZA



MISHKAN

36:14–19 The curtains (*yeriot*)

Three layers of curtains covered the Tent of Meeting. The lowest layer curtains called the *mishkan*, meaning “sanctuary,” covered the boards of the tent. Above the *mishkan* was a second layer, curtains of goats’ hair called the *ohel*, meaning “tent,” that were longer and wider than the *mishkan*. Above the curtains of goats’ hair was a third layer, called the “roof for the tent,” which covered the top, and not the sides, of the Tent of Meeting only.

The *mishkan* consisted of ten curtains, each 28 cubits long and 4 cubits wide (about 13.4 x 1.92 m; 44 x 6.3 ft). The ten curtains were sewn together in two equal sets of five, and these two sets were joined by fifty golden clasps. The clasps were inserted into loops of blue wool on the edge of each set of curtains. The curtains were woven of thread consisting of twenty-four strands: six of white linen and eighteen of dyed wool (six blue, six purple, and six scarlet), all twined together.

The goats’ hair curtains consisted of eleven curtains, each 30 cubits long and 4 cubits wide (about 14.4 x 1.92 m; 47.2 x 6.3 ft). The eleven curtains were divided into two sets: the first of six curtains and the second of five curtains. These sets were joined by fifty bronze clasps, which were inserted into loops of blue wool on the edge of each set of curtains.

The roof of the tent, which was the top layer and covered the curtains of goats’ hair, consisted of a single curtain – half of which was made of ram skins dyed red and half of which was made of fine *tahash* skin. The roof was 30 cubits long and 10 cubits wide (about 14.4 x 4.8 m; 47.2 x 15.75 ft). ■ MM



The curtains, illustration

עָשָׂה בִּירֵיעָה הָאֶחָת וְחֲמִשִּׁים לָלֶאֱת עָשָׂה בִּקְצֵה הִירֵיעָה
אֲשֶׁר בַּמִּתְכַּנֶּת הַשְּׁנִית מִקְבִּילֹת הַלָּלֶאֱת אֶחָת אֶל־אֶחָת:
וַיַּעַשׂ חֲמִשִּׁים קְרָסִי זָהָב וַיַּחֲבֵר אֶת־הִירֵיעֹת אֶחָת אֶל־אֶחָת י
בִּקְרָסִים וַיְהִי הַמִּשְׁכָּן אֶחָד:

- יד וַיַּעַשׂ יִרְיעֹת עֲזִים לְאַהֲלֵ עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן עֶשְׂתֵּי־עֶשְׂרֵה יִרְיעֹת
- טו עָשָׂה אֹתָם: אֶדְךְ הִירֵיעָה הָאֶחָת שְׁלֹשִׁים בָּאֶמָּה וְאַרְבַּע
- אֲמֹת רָחֵב הִירֵיעָה הָאֶחָת מִדָּה אֶחָת לְעֶשְׂתֵּי עֶשְׂרֵה יִרְיעֹת:

on the first sheet and fifty on the edge of the end sheet of the other set, so that the loops were opposite one another.

- 13 He made fifty gold clasps and used them to fasten the two sets of sheets together so that the Tabernacle was all of one piece.
- 14 He made sheets of goats’ hair for a tent over the Tabernacle.
- 15 There were eleven such sheets. All eleven were the same size:



וַיַּחְבֵּר אֶת־חֲמִשָּׁה הַיְרִיעֹת לְבָד וְאֶת־שֵׁשׁ הַיְרִיעֹת לְבָד: וַיַּעַשׂ^{טז}
 לָלֶאֱת חֲמִשִּׁים עַל־שֵׁפֶת הַיְרִיעָה הַקֵּיצָנָה בַּמַּחְבֶּרֶת וּחֲמִשִּׁים^{יח}
 לָלֶאֱת עֹשֶׂה עַל־שֵׁפֶת הַיְרִיעָה הַחֹבֶרֶת הַשֵּׁנִית: וַיַּעַשׂ^{יט}
 קְרָסִי נְחֹשֶׁת חֲמִשִּׁים לַחֲבֵר אֶת־הָאֹהֶל לִהְיוֹת אֶחָד: וַיַּעַשׂ^כ
 מִכֶּסֶה לָאֹהֶל עֹרֹת אֵילָם מְאֻדָּמִים וּמִכֶּסֶה עֹרֹת תַּחֲשִׁים^{כא}
 מְלֻמָּעָה: וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים לַמִּשְׁכָּן עֲצֵי^{כב}
 שִׁטִּים עֲמֻדִים: עֹשֶׂה אֲמֹת אֶדְנִי הַקְּרָשׁ וְאֲמֹה וְחִצֵּי הָאֲמֹה^{כג}
 רֹחֵב הַקְּרָשׁ הָאֶחָד: שְׁתֵּי יָדָי לַקְּרָשׁ הָאֶחָד מְשֻׁלָּבֶת אֶחָת^{כד}
 אֶל־אֶחָת בֵּין עֹשֶׂה לְכָל קְרָשֵׁי הַמִּשְׁכָּן: וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַקְּרָשִׁים^{כה}
 לַמִּשְׁכָּן עֹשְׂדִים קְרָשִׁים לְפָאֵת נֹגֵב תִּימָנָה: וְאַרְבָּעִים אֲדָנִי־
 זָסָף עֹשֶׂה תַּחַת עֹשְׂדִים הַקְּרָשִׁים שְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת־הַקְּרָשׁ^{כו}
 הָאֶחָד לְשְׁתֵּי יָדָיו וּשְׁנֵי אֲדָנִים תַּחַת־הַקְּרָשׁ הָאֶחָד לְשְׁתֵּי

חמישי

thirty cubits long and four cubits wide. He joined five of the 16
 sheets into one set and six into another. He made fifty loops 17
 on the edge of the outermost sheet of the first set, and fifty
 loops on the edge of the second set. He made fifty bronze 18
 clasps to join the tent together into a single piece. And for 19
 the tent he made a covering of rams' skins dyed red, with a
 covering of fine leather above. Then he made the 20 •
 upright boards for the Tabernacle from acacia wood. Each 21
 was ten cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. Each board 22
 had two matching tenons; all the Tabernacle's boards were
 made in this way. He made twenty boards for the south side, 23
 and forty silver sockets to go under them, two sockets under 24 •



MISHKAN

36:24–30 The silver sockets

The silver sockets held the boards in place and protected them. Each socket had a mortise (receptacle) into which one of the board's two projecting tenons would fit. That is, under each board there were two sockets—ninety-six boards in total on the three sides of the structure.

Each silver socket was 1 cubit (about 48 cm; 1.6 ft) in height and .75 cubits (about

36 cm; 1.2 ft) in width, where the width refers to the side of the socket facing the interior. The thickness of each socket, meaning the side facing the adjoining board, was 1 cubit. The slot within each socket measured .5 cubits by .25 cubits (about 24 x 12 cm; 9.4 x 4.7 in). • MM



Silver sockets, illustration

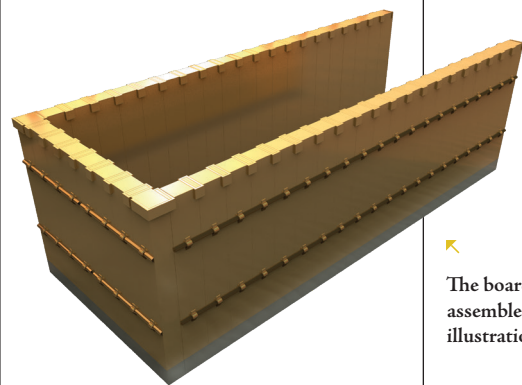


MISHKAN

36:20–34 The boards

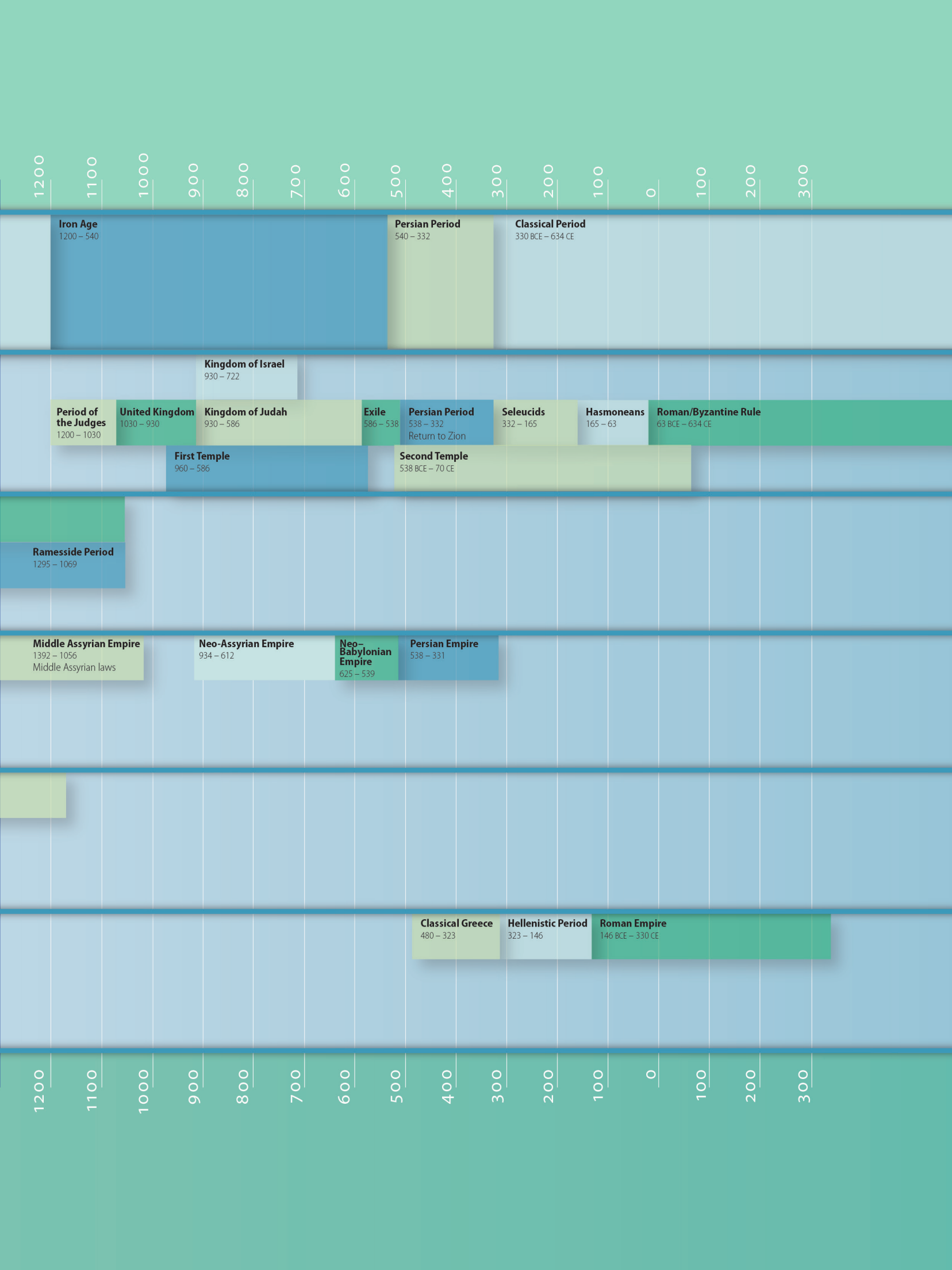
The boards formed the structure of the Tabernacle (the lower curtain was a screen in front of the sacred vessels) and contained the sacred vessels. They rested in silver sockets forming a three-sided structure, open on the fourth side. The boards were joined together at the top with rings; the Tabernacle was held in place using crossbars on all sides.

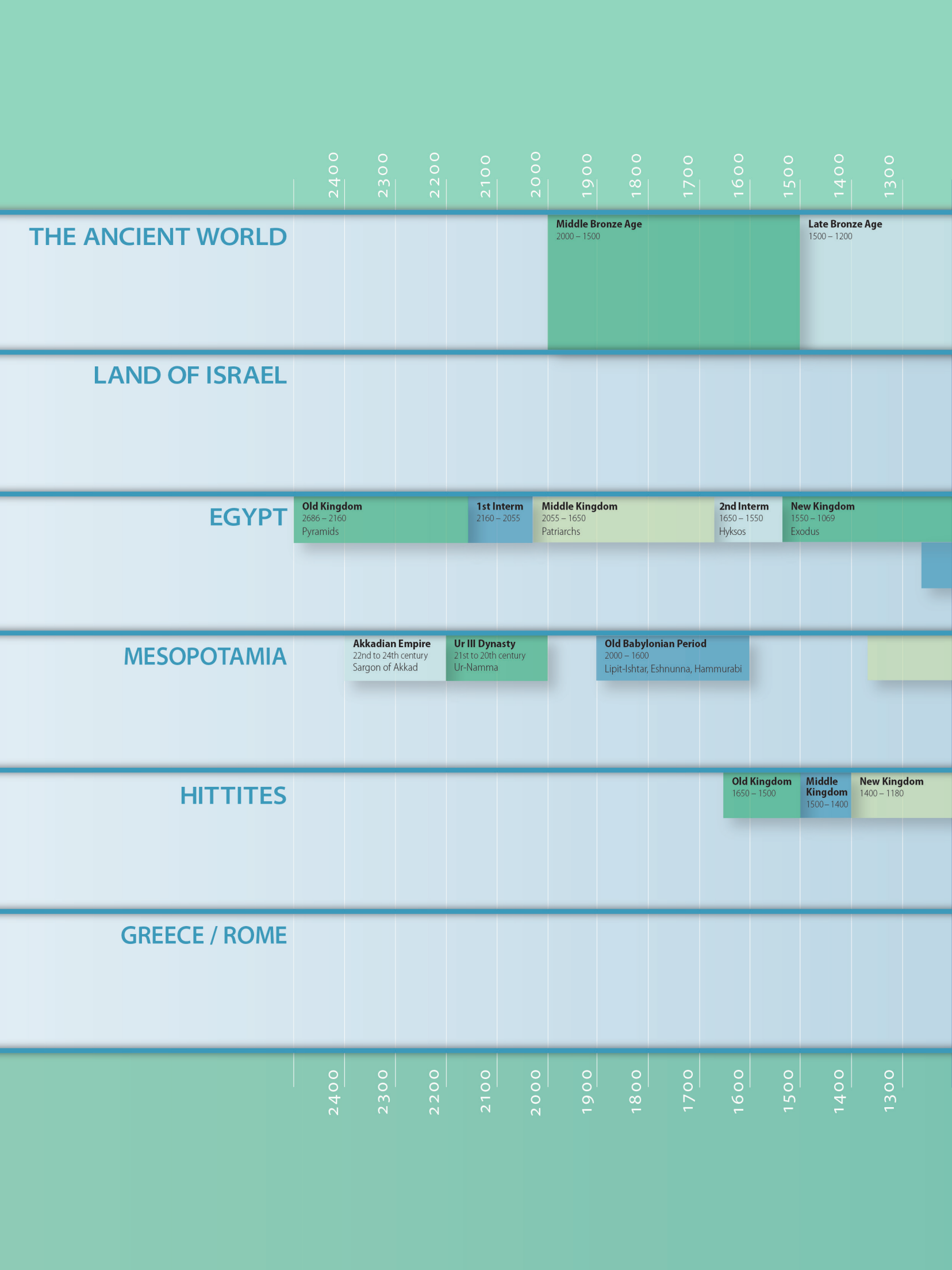
The Tabernacle was constructed using forty-eight boards: twenty on the north side, twenty on the south side, and eight on the west side. The bottom of each board had two tenons, i.e., two protrusions, which fit into the silver sockets.



The boards, assembled, illustration

The boards were made of acacia wood covered on both sides with plates of gold, which were connected to the beams using golden nails. Each beam was 10 cubits (about 4.8 m; 15.75 ft) in height and 1.5 cubits (about 72 cm; 2.4 ft) in width – where width is the side facing the interior of the Tabernacle. The thickness of each board was 1 cubit (about 48 cm; 1.6 ft) – where thickness is the side facing the adjoining board. • MM





CASPIAN SEA

PERSIA

ASSYRIA

MESOPOTAMIA

BABYLONIA

SUMER

ARABIA

◀
Ancient Near East





Hattusas

HITTITE EMPIRE

ANATOLIA

Carchemish

Ebla

Hamath

Ugarit

Byblos

Sidon

Tyre

ARAM

Damascus

LEVANT

Hazor

AMMON

Jerusalem

CANAAN

MOAB

EDOM

Tanis

Ramesses

Memphis

LOWER EGYPT

SINAI

el-Amarna

EGYPT



MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Jerusalem

Alexandria

Gaza

DEAD SEA

Pelusium

Avaris

NILE DELTA

GREAT BITTER LAKE

Cairo

Giza

Saqqara

Memphis

LAKE MOERIS

LOWER EGYPT

Serabit el-Khadim

NILE RIVER

GULF OF AQABA

Beni Hasan

el-Amarna

EASTERN DESERT

WESTERN DESERT

RED SEA

Abydos

Thebes
(Luxor and Karnak)

UPPER EGYPT

Aswan

Abu Simbel

KUSH

NUBIAN DESERT

◀
Ancient Egypt