Adam Clarke Commentary Exodus 38

Adam Clarke:

Introduction
Bezaleel makes the altar of burnt-offering, Exodus 38:1-7. He makes the laver and its foot out of the mirrors given by the women, Exodus 38:8. The court, its pillars, hangings, etc., Exodus 38:9-20. The whole tabernacle and its work finished by Bezaleel, Aholiab, and their assistants, Exodus 38:21-23. The amount of the gold contributed, Exodus 38:24. The amount of the silver, and how it was expended, Exodus 38:25-28. The amount of the brass, and how this was used, Exodus 38:29-31.

Verse 1
The altar of burnt-offering - See Clarkeâ€˜s note on Exodus 27:1; and for its horns, pots, shovels, basins, etc., see the meaning of the Hebrew terms explained, Exodus 27:3-5 (note).

Verse 8
He made the laver - See Clarkeâ€˜s note on Exodus 30:18, etc.

The looking-glasses - The word ×žר•×ª (maroth), from ×¨×•×” (raah), he saw, signifies reflectors or mirrors of any kind. Here metal, highly polished, must certainly be meant, as glass was not yet in use; and had it even been in use, we are sure that looking - Glasses could not make a Brazen laver. The word therefore should be rendered mirrors, not looking-glasses, which in the above verse is perfectly absurd, because from those maroth the brazen laver was made. The first mirrors known among men were the clear, still, fountain, and unruffled lake; and probably the mineral called mica, which is a very general substance through all parts of the earth. Plates of it have been found of three feet square, and it is so extremely divisible into laminae, that it has been divided into plates so thin as to be only the three hundred thousandth part of an inch. A plate of this forms an excellent mirror when any thing black is attached to the opposite side. A plate of this mineral, nine inches by eight, now lies before me; a piece of black cloth, or any other black substance, at the back, converts it into a good mirror; or it would serve as it is for a square of glass, as every object is clearly perceivable through it. It is used in Russian ships of war, instead of glass, for windows. The first artificial mirrors were apparently made of brass, afterwards of polished steel, and when luxury increased they were made of silver; but they were made at a very early period of mixed metal, particularly of tin and copper, the best of which, as Pliny tells us, were formerly manufactured at Brundusium: Optima apud majores fuerant Brundisina, stanno et aere mixtis - Hist. Nat. lib. xxxiii., cap. 9. But, according to him, the most esteemed were those made of tin; and he says that silver mirrors became so common that even the servant girls used them: Specula (ex stanno) laudatissima Brundisii temperabantur; donec argenteis uti caepere et ancillae; lib. xxxiv., cap. 17. When the Egyptian women went to the temples, they always carried their mirrors with them. The Israelitish women probably did the same, and Dr. Shaw states that the Arabian women carry them constantly hung at their breasts. It is worthy of remark, that at first these women freely gave up their ornaments for this important service, and now give their very mirrors, probably as being of little farther service, seeing they had already given up the principal decorations of their persons. Woman has been invidiously defined by Aristotle, an animal fond of dress, (though this belongs to the whole human race, and not exclusively to woman). Had this been true of the Israelitish women, in the present case we must say they nobly sacrificed their incentives to pride to the service of their God. Woman, go thou and do likewise.

Of the women - which assembled at the door - What the employment of these women was at the door of the tabernacle, is not easily known. Some think they assembled there for purposes of devotion. Others, that they kept watch there during the night; and this is the most probable opinion, for they appear to have been in the same employment as those who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation in the days of Samuel, who were abused by the sons of the high priest Eli, 1 Samuel 2:22. Among the ancients women were generally employed in the office of porters or doorkeepers. Such were employed about the house of the high priest in our Lordâ€˜s time; for a woman is actually represented as keeping the door of the palace of the high priest, John 18:17: Then saith the Damsel that Kept The Door unto Peter; see also Matthew 26:69. In 2 Samuel 4:6, both the Septuagint and Vulgate make a woman porter or doorkeeper to Ishbosheth. Aristophanes mentions them in the same office, and calls them Î£Î·Î°Î¹Ï, , (Sekis), which seems to signify a common maid-servant. Aristoph, in Vespis, ver. 768: -
á½‰Ï„Î¹ Ï„Î·Î½ Î¸Ï…ρ•Î±Î½ Î±Î½Îµá¿³Î¾Îµ á¼¡ Î£Î·Î°Î¹Ï, Î»Î±Î¸Ï•Î± .

Homer, Odyss., Ï^ , ver. 225-229, mentions Actoris, Penelopeâ€˜s maid, whose office it was to keep the door of her chamber: -
Î¹Î°Ï„Î¿Î¿ Î¹Ï•Î¹Ï, - - -
á¼© Î½Ï‰Î•Î½ ÎµÎ¹Ï…Ï„Î¿ Î¸Ï…Ï•Î¹Ï, Ï€Ï…Î°Î¹Î½Î¿Ï… Î¸Î±Î»Î±Î¼Î¿Î¿ .

And Euripides, in Troad., ver. 197, brings in Hecuba, complaining that she who was wont to sit upon a throne is now reduced to the miserable necessity of becoming a doorkeeper or a nurse, in order to get a morsel of bread.
- - - Î· Ï„Î±Î½
Î Î±Ï•Î± Ï€Ï•Î¿Î¸Ï…Ï•Î¿Ï, Ï†Ï…Î»Î±Î°Î±Î½ Î°Î±Ï„Ï„Î¿Ï‡Î¿Ï…ÏƒÎ± ,
Î— Ï€Î±Î¹Î´Ï‰Î½ Î¸Ï•Î¼Ï€Ï„Î¿Î¹ .

Sir John Chardin observes, that women are employed to keep the gate of the palace of the Persian kings. Plautus, Curcul., act 1, scene 1, mentions an old woman, who was keeper of the gate.
Anus hic solet cubitare, custos janitrix.

Many other examples might be produced. It is therefore very likely that the persons mentioned here, and in 1 Samuel 2:22, were the women who guarded the tabernacle; and that they regularly relieved each other, a troop or company regularly keeping watch: and indeed this seems to be implied in the original, ×¦×‘×•×• (tsabeu), they came by troops; and these troops successively consecrated their mirrors to the service of the tabernacle. See Calmet on John 18:16.

Verse 9
The court - See Clarke on Exodus 27:9.

Verse 17
The hooks - and their fillets - The capitals, and the silver bands that went round them; see Clarkeâ€˜s note on Exodus 26:32.

Verse 21
This is the sum of the tabernacle - That is, The foregoing account contains a detail of all the articles which Bezaleel and Aholiab were commanded to make; and which were reckoned up by the Levites, over whom Ithamar, the son of Aaron, presided.

Verse 24
All the gold that was occupied for the work, etc. - To be able to ascertain the quantum and value of the gold, silver, and brass, which were employed in the tabernacle, and its different utensils, altars, etc., it will be necessary to enter into the subject in considerable detail.
In the course of my notes on this and the preceding book, I have had frequent occasion to speak of the shekel in use among the ancient Hebrews, which, following Dean Prideaux, I have always computed at 3s (shillings), English. As some value it at 2s. 6d., and others at 2s. 4d., I think it necessary to lay before the reader the learned deanâ€˜s mode of computation as a proper introduction to the calculations which immediately follow.
â€œAmong the ancients, the way of reckoning their money was by talents. So the Hebrews, so the Babylonians, and so the Romans did reckon. And of these talents they had subdivisions which were usually in minas and drachms; i.e., of their talents into minas, and their minas into drachms. The Hebrews had, besides these, their shekels and half-shekels, or bekas; and the Romans their denarii, which last were very nearly of the same value with the drachms of the Greeks. What was the value of a Hebrew talent appears from Exodus 38:25, Exodus 38:26, for there 603,550 persons being taxed at half a shekel a head, they must have paid in the whole 301,775 shekels; and that sum is there said to amount to one hundred talents, and 1775 shekels over: if therefore we deduct the 1775 shekels from the number 301,775, and divide the remaining sum, i.e., 300,000, by a hundred, this will prove each of those talents to contain three thousand shekels. Each of these shekels weighed about three shillings of our money; and sixty of them, Ezekiel tells us, Ezekiel 45:12, made a mina; and therefore fifty of those minas made a talent. And as to their drachms, it appears by the Gospel of St. Matthew that it was the fourth part of a shekel, that is, nine-pence of our money. For there (Matthew 17:24) the tribute money annually paid to the temple, by every Jew, (Talmud in shekalim), which was half a shekel, is called Î”Î¹Î´Ï•Î±Ï‡Î¼Î¿Î½ (i.e., the two drachm piece); and therefore, if half a shekel contained two drachms, a drachm must have been the quarter part of a shekel, and every shekel must have contained four of them: and so Josephus tells us it did; for he says, Antiq., lib. iii., c. 9, that a shekel contained four Attic drachms, which is not exactly to be understood according to the weight, but according to the valuation in the currency of common payments. For according to the weight, the heaviest Attic drachms did not exceed eight-pence farthing half-farthing, of our money; and a Hebrew drachm, as I have said, was nine-pence; but what the Attic drachm fell short of the Hebrew in weight might be made up in the fineness, and its ready currency in all countries, (which last the Hebrew drachm could not have), and so might be made equivalent in common estimation among the Jews. Allowing therefore a drachm, as well Attic as Jewish, as valued in Judea, to be equivalent to nine-pence of our money, a Beka or half-shekel will be one shilling and six-pence; a Shekel, three shillings; a Mina, nine pounds; and a Talent, four hundred and fifty pounds. So it was in the time of Moses and Ezekiel; and so was it in the time of Josephus

among that people, for he tells us, Antiq., lib. xiv., c. 12, that a Hebrew mina contained two Litras and a half, which comes exactly to nine pounds of our money: for a litra, being the same with a Roman libra, contained twelve ounces troy weight, that is, ninety-six drachms; and therefore two litras and a half must contain two hundred and forty drachms, which being estimated at nine-pence a drachm, according to the Jewish valuation, comes exactly to sixty shekels, or nine pounds of our money. And this account agrees exactly with that of Alexandria. For the Alexandrian talent contained 12,000 Attic drachms; and 12,000 Attic drachms, according to the Jewish valuation, being 12,000 of our nine-pences, they amount to 450 pounds of sterling money, which is the same in value as the Mosaic talent. But here it is to be observed, that though the Alexandrian talent amounted to 12,000 Attic drachms, yet they themselves reckoned it but at 6000 drachms, because every Alexandrian drachm contained two Attic drachms; and therefore the Septuagint version being made by the Alexandrian Jews, they there render the Hebrew word shekel, by the Greek Î´Î¹Î´Ï•Î±Ï‡Î¼Î¿Î½ , which signifies two drachms, because two Alexandrian drachms make a shekel, two of them amounting to as much as four Attic drachms. And therefore computing the Alexandrian money according to the same method in which we have computed the Jewish, it will be as follows: One drachm of Alexandria will be of our money eighteen pence; one didrachm or shekel, consisting of two drachms of Alexandria, or four of Attica, will be three shillings; one mina, consisting of sixty didrachms or shekels, will be nine pounds; and one talent, consisting of fifty minas, will be four hundred and fifty pounds, which is the talent of Moses, Exodus 38:25, Exodus 38:26: and so also is it the talent of Josephus, Antiq., lib. iii., c. 7; for he tells us that a Hebrew talent contained one hundred Greek (i.e., Attic) minas. For those fifty minas, which here make an Alexandrian talent, would be one hundred Attic minas in the like method of valuation; the Alexandrian talent containing double as much as the Attic talent, both in the whole, and also in all its parts, in whatever method both shall be equally distributed. Among the Greeks the established rule was, Jul. Pollux, Onomast., lib. x., c. 6, that one hundred drachms made a mina, and sixty minas a talent. But in some different states their drachms being different, accordingly their minas and talents were within the same proportion different also. But the money of Attica was the standard by which all the rest were valued, according as they more or less differed from it. And therefore, it being of most note, wherever any Greek historian speaks of talents, minas, or drachms, if they be simply mentioned, it is to be always understood of talents, minas, or drachms of Attica, and never of the talents, minas, or drachms of any other place, unless it be expressed. Mr. Brerewood, going by the goldsmithâ€˜s weights, reckons an Attic drachm to be the same with a drachm now in use in their shops, that is, the eighth part of an ounce; and therefore lays it at the value of seven-pence halfpenny of our money, or the eighth part of a crown, which is or ought to be an ounce weight. But Dr. Bernard, going more accurately to work, lays the middle sort of Attic drachms at eight-pence farthing of our money, and the minas and talents accordingly, in the proportions above mentioned. The Babylonish talent, according to Pollux, Onomast., lib. x., c. 6, contained seven thousand of those drachms. The Roman talent (see Festus Pompeius) contained seventy-two Italic minas, which were the same with the Roman libras; and ninety-six Roman denariuses, each being of the value of seven-pence halfpenny of our money, made a Roman libra. But all the valuations I have hitherto mentioned must be understood only of silver money, and not of gold; for that was much higher. The proportion of gold to silver was among the ancients commonly as ten to one; sometimes it was raised to be as eleven to one, sometimes as twelve, and sometimes as thirteen to one. In the time of King Edward the First it was here, in England, at the value of ten to one; but it is now gotten at sixteen to one; and so I value it in all the reductions which I make in this history of ancient sums to the present value. But to make the whole of this matter the easier to the reader, I will lay all of it before him for his clear view in this following table of valuations: -

d CurrencyÂ£
(British pound)s.
(shilling)d.
(penny
1/12 shilling)
d
d Hebrew Money
d
d A Hebrew drachm
d 9
d
d Two drachms made a beka or half-shekel, which was the tribute money paid by every Jew to the temple
d 16
d
d Two bekas made a shekel
d 30

d
d Sixty shekels made a mina.
d 900
d
d Fifty minas made a talent
d 45000
d
d A talent of gold, sixteen to one
d 720000
d
d Attic Money, according to Mr. Brerewood
d
d An Attic drachm
d 7.5
d
d A hundred drachms made a mina
d 326.0
d
d Sixty minas made a talent
d 187100
d
d A talent of gold, sixteen to one
d 300000
d
d Attic Money, according to Dr. Bernard
d
d An Attic drachm
d 8.25
d
d A hundred drachms made a mina
d 389.00
d
d Sixty minas made a talent
d 20650
d
d A talent of gold, sixteen to one
d 330000
d
d Babylonian Money, according to Mr. Brerewood
d
d A Babylonish talent of silver containing seven thousand Attic drachms
d 218150.
d
d A Babylonish talent in gold, sixteen to one
d 350000.
d
d Babylonian Money, according to Dr. Bernard
d
d A Babylonish talent in silver
d 240126
d
d A Babylonish talent in gold, sixteen to one
d 385000.
d
d Alexandrian Money
d
d A drachm of Alexandria, containing two Attic drachms, as valued by the Jews
d 16
d
d A didrachm of Alexandria, containing two Alexandrian drachms, which was a Hebrew shekel
d 30

d
d Sixty didrachms or Hebrew shekels made a mina
d 900
d
d Fifty minas made a talent
d 45000
d
d A talent of gold, sixteen to one
d 720000.
d
d Roman Money
d
d Four sesterciuses made a Roman denarius
d 7.5
d
d Ninety-six Roman denariuses made an Italic mina, which was the same with a Roman libra
d 300
d
d Seventy-two Roman libras made a talent
d 21600
d
d
There were twenty-nine talents seven hundred and thirty shekels of Gold; one hundred talents one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five shekels of Silver; and seventy talents two thousand four hundred shekels of Brass.
If with Dean Prideaux we estimate the value of the silver shekel at three shillings English, we shall obtain the weight of the shekel by making use of the following proportion. As sixty-two shillings, the value of a pound weight of silver as settled by the British laws, is to two hundred and forty, the number of penny-weights in a pound troy, so is three shillings, the value of a shekel of silver, to 11 dwts. 14 22/31 grains, the weight of the shekel required.
In the next place, to find the value of a shekel of gold we must make use of the proportion following: As one ounce troy is to 3Â£. 17s. 10Â´d., the legal value of an ounce of gold, so is 11 dwts. 14 22/31 grains, the weight of the shekel as found by the last proportion, to 2Â£. 5s. 2Â´ 42/93d., the value of the shekel of gold required. From this datum we shall soon be able to ascertain the value of all the gold employed in the work of this holy place, by the following arithmetical process: Reduce 2Â£. 5s. 2Â´ 42/93d. to the lowest term mentioned, which is 201,852 ninety-third parts of a farthing. Multiply this last number by 3000, the number of shekels in a talent, and the product by 29, the number of talents; and add in 730 times 201,852, on account of the 730 shekels which were above the 29 talents employed in the work, and we shall have for the last product 17,708,475,960, which, divided successively by 93, 4, 12, and 20, will give 198,347Â£. 12s. 6d. for the total value of the gold employed in the tabernacle, etc.
The value of the silver contributed by 603,550 Israelites, at half a shekel or eighteen pence per man, may be found by an easy arithmetical calculation to amount to 45,266Â£. 5s.
The value of the brass at 1s. per pound will amount to 513Â£. 17s.

The Gold of the holy place weighed 4245 pounds.
The Silver of the tabernacle 14,602 pounds.
The Brass 10,277 pounds troy weight.

The total value of all the gold, silver, and brass of the tabernacle will consequently amount to 244,127Â£. 14s. 6d. And the total weight of all these three metals amounts to 29,124 pounds troy, which, reduced to avoirdupois weight, is nearly ten tons and a half. When all this is considered, besides the quantity of gold which was employed in the golden calf, and which was all destroyed, it is no wonder that the sacred text should say the Hebrews spoiled the Egyptians, particularly as in those early times the precious metals were probably not very plentiful in Egypt.

Verse 26
A bekah for every man - The Hebrew word ×‘×§×™ (beka), from ×‘×§×™ (baka), to divide, separate into two, seems to signify, not a particular coin, but a shekel broken or cut in two; so, anciently, our farthing was a penny divided in the midst and then subdivided, so that each division contained the fourth part of the penny; hence its name fourthing or fourthling, since corrupted into farthing.
There appear to be three particular reasons why much riches should be employed in the construction of the

tabernacle, etc.

1.To impress the peopleâ€˜s minds with the glory and dignity of the Divine Majesty, and the importance of his service.

2.To take out of their hands the occasion of covetousness; for as they brought much spoils out of Egypt, and could have little if any use for gold and silver in the wilderness, where it does not appear that they had much intercourse with any other people, and were miraculously supported, so that they did not need their riches, it was right to employ that in the worship of God which otherwise might have engendered that love which is the root of all evil.
3.To prevent pride and vainglory, by leading them to give up to the Divine service even the ornaments of their persons, which would have had too direct a tendency to divert their minds from better things. Thus Godâ€˜s worship was rendered august and respectable, incitements to sin and low desires removed, and the people instructed to consider nothing valuable, but as far as it might be employed to the glory and in the service of God.