

זֶר *zer* ‘band’ &

מִסְגֶּרֶת *misgeret* ‘rim’

In short:

► *zer* is a decorative strip / band / molding.

The ark, the incense altar, and the table for the showbread all have this.

Because the table for the showbread has no “sides” like the ark and the incense altar, and thus no surface on which such a strip could be applied to, it needs an additional ...:

► *misgeret* – that is a solid, substantial rim / ridge / edge / border (probably of wood), onto which the *zer* is fixed.

Discussion

The word *zer* is found only with regard to the Tabernacle equipment. There it is used consistently for the ark (Exod. 25:11), the showbread table (25:24), and the incense altar (30:3 etc.).

Regarding the Tabernacle equipment, *misgeret* is used only in connection with the table (25:25), but it also occurs in Solomon’s water carts. There, the *misgarot* were analyzed as horizontal bars forming a rectangular frame between the four uprights in the corners.¹

Both terms occur together in Exod. 25, where it says about the table for the showbread (NASB):

²⁴ You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a gold border [זֶר, *zer*] around it. ²⁵ And you shall make for it a rim [מִסְגֶּרֶת, *misgeret*] of a hand width around it; and you shall make a gold border [זֶר, *zer*] for the rim [מִסְגֶּרֶת, *misgeret*] around it.²

The UBS *Handbook* on Exod. 25:11 says *zer* “refers to a “gold border” (TEV), or “band,” that was to be added to the outside of the box. It was evidently a decorative “rim” (Fox) around the sides of the box”.

The Realia HB does not explain *misgeret* and does not discuss the table’s construction (Exod. 25:24f.), but it discusses *zer* in § 4.1. “rim / molding” with regard to the ark and says:

It had a raised gold rim or molding around it for decoration. ...

Molding: The gold “border” or “band” around the Covenant Box seems to have been for decoration. In Exodus 25:11 the Hebrew word rendered “round about” by RSV means “all around it,” as GNT renders it, since the word has the basic meaning of encircling. NAB has “around the top of it,” but the molding may have been placed somewhat lower than at the top edge of the Box.

Houtman (3-volume commentary on Exodus in the HCOT series, 3:376f.; 3:394f.) argues the ark and the incense altar have sides to which the *zer* as ornamental molding can be attached. The table does not have that, so one has to add an edge/rim to it first, of wood.

This rim might be attached to the blade of the table, or further down, to stabilize the whole construction. He lists scholars’ guesses, noncommittal. He is inclined to take v. 25 as explaining v. 24, thus there is only one molding.

In contrast, Stuart (NAC) thinks of two moldings. Following NIV, he begins v. 25 with “Also make ...”. He also has a long discussion about whether the rim goes upward (making the table surface into a kind of tray), or to the side, or downward.

Both consider the function of the rim may be to avoid things slipping off the table.

I favor Houtman’s view that v. 25 explains how the instruction in v. 24 is to be carried out. That is to say, the end product appears to have one rim, decorated with a band, not two separate edges (cf. the UBS *Handbook*).

There seems to be more or less agreement that the *misgeret* is a more substantial piece of the construction, whereas the *zer* is only decorative.

¹ See *The Bible Translator* 2015, 66.1. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2051677015569713>.

² The German Elberfelder version has for *misgeret* “Leiste”, and for *zer* “Kante”.