

Summary of Trudie Labuschagne's Undergraduate Thesis (Groningen 1993)

DE MENORA IN WOORD EN BEELD

Een studie over de vorm, functie en betekenis van de menora
in het Oude Testament en de latere symboliek

THE MENORAH IN TEKST AND IMAGE

A study of the Form, Function and Significance of the Menorah in the Old Testament

(Submitted in support of her candidature for an Old Testament doctorate in the Theological Faculty of the University of Groningen, for which she received the Prof. Dr. H.G. Hubbeling Award in 1994)

This is a study from different perspectives of the sevenfold lampstand, the well-known typical Jewish symbol, an investigation into its Old Testament background, its vestiges in the Apocrypha and the New Testament, and its representation in ancient Jewish art.

It starts with an analysis in context of the Old Testament texts in which the word *menorah* occurs, and is followed by a thematic discussion of the menorah in the sanctuary (the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple), in Zechariah's vision, its form and the floral motifs in its design, its holiness, and its relation to illumination, light, fire and the Burning Bush.

The study of the form of the menorah strongly suggests that it originated from an Ancient Near Eastern iconographic motif: the stylized (holy) tree. In the texts it is indeed described as a tree-like lampstand with seven lamps, consisting of a central shaft and six branches (too often erroneously referred to as the 'seven-branched' lampstand!).

The menorah-pattern appears to have been used as a favourite literary compositional model to give structure to biblical texts. There are numerous examples of the menorah-model being used to structure a text in such a way that it has a clear focal point. This part of the text, its middle, is emphasized, being surrounded by three sections on either side, concentrically or symmetrically arranged, in the same way as the central shaft of the menorah is surrounded by three branches on either side. This means that its central positioning gives it special prominence and importance.

Apart from this *structuring* function of the menorah-pattern and the *practical* function of the six-branched lampstand (to give light) the menorah also has a *cultic* function (the ritual maintenance of its lamps). More importantly still, is its *symbolic* significance as the holy object representing the 'location of light', more specifically YHWH's presence.

Whereas in the Old Testament the menorah is associated with the presence of YHWH by means of the light-symbolism, in the New Testament, being associated with Christ as the light of the world, it obtains a new function. In this way it symbolizes the continuity of God's presence in both Testaments.