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C0703 – January 24, 2007 – Ex 26:1-37 – The Tabernacle & Its Coverings

This is one of those sections of Scripture that faithful readers of the Bible probably never really understand because its detailed construction plans and embroidered curtains. It's very difficult to wade through but a beautiful picture emerges.

- C. **The Tabernacle Proper (26:1-33)ⁱ**
 - 1. **The Tabernacle and Tent Curtains (26:1-14)**
 - a. **Tabernacle Curtains of Linen (26:1-6)**

Verses 1-6 describe the innermost curtains which are the most beautiful and could be seen on the ceiling within the tabernacle. These curtains were overlaid by several other curtains that would protect these and the furniture from the elements. Inside it was a world within the world, a microcosm of the macrocosm. God's residence in the microcosm was a picture of His presence in the macrocosm.

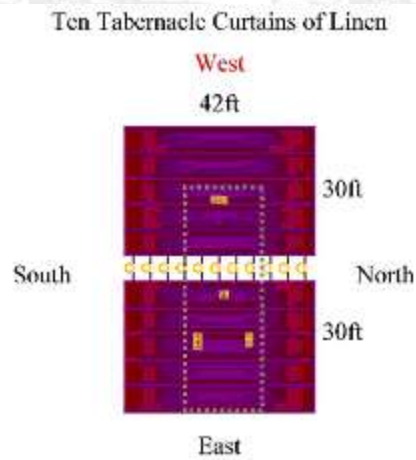
Exodus 26:1-6 “Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twisted linen and blue and purple and scarlet *material*; you shall make them with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. “The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall have the same measurements. “Five curtains shall be joined to one another, and *the other* five curtains *shall be* joined to one another. “You shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the *first* set, and likewise you shall make *them* on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the second set. “You shall make fifty loops in the

one curtain, and you shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite each other. “You shall make fifty clasps of gold, and join the curtains to one another with the clasps so that the tabernacle will be a unit.

The **tabernacle** here is the *miskan* (LXX has *skene*) and refers to a temporary dwelling. This is because the **tabernacle** here was intended to be moved from place to place as the children of Israel wandered. **Ten curtains** were to be made. The material was to be **linen** of three colors: **blue** which is actually a “violet-purple”, **purple** which was a “red-purple” and **scarlet** which was a “deep crimson red”. These three colors of **linen** were to be **twisted** together to portray **cherubim** (*kerubim*). This is the work of an artist. The text says **the work of a skillful workman** but the original Hebrew has the thought “the work of a thinker”. That is, the sewing of these beautiful curtains was work which involved the creative thought of the artist. The thoughtful artist would ask, “How can I twist multiple dyed linens together so that it pictures cherubim?” “What should the cherubim look like?” “What does the face of a cherub look like?” “What does the form of a cherub look like?” “How can I twist three linens into such a person?” The artist would have to spend some time with Moses to learn the answer to many of these questions since Moses is the one who saw the **cherubim** on the mountain. They would be picking his brain and thoughtfully make **ten curtains**. Why **cherubim**? Because **cherubim** guard the holiness of God. Josephus mentions that Moses said he saw cherubim near the throne of God when on Mt Sinai.ⁱⁱ They are first seen guarding the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:24), then they are seen guarding the holiness of God on the Ark of the Covenant (Exod 25:10-22). God is often said to be enthroned above the cherubim (2 Sam 6:2; 2 Ki 19:15; 1 Chron 13:6; Ps 80:1; 99:1; Isa 37:16). Cherubim have wings and appear to have the hands of a man under their wings (Ezek 10:8). They have something like wheels underneath them to move (Ezek 10:16) and they have two faces, one of a man and the other of a lion (Ezek 41:18-19).

Each highly artistic **curtain** was the same size; 42 feet in length and 6 feet in width. These do not run from front to back but from side to side. **Five curtains shall be joined to one another**, that is sewn together lengthwise and the other **five shall also be** sewn together lengthwise so that in all there are **two sets** of curtains, each 42 feet in length and 36 feet in width. **Two**

sets because to sew all ten together would have made it far too heavy to manage.



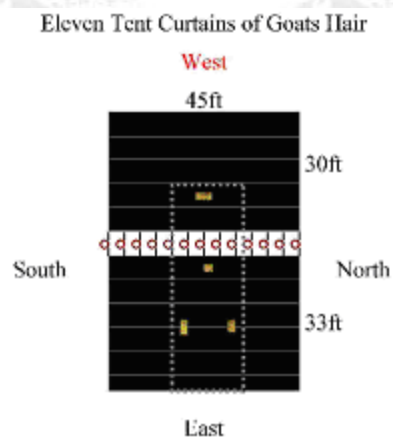
Along one of the long edges of one set they were to sew **fifty blue loops**, the **blue** here is a “violet-blue”. And along one of the long edges of the second set they were to do the same. They should sew them equally spaced along the 42 feet so that they lined up **opposite** to the loops on the other set. Thus, there were 100 **loops** in all, **fifty** on one set and **fifty** on the other, equally spaced along the 42 feet. So there would be a **loop** ~ every 10 inches.

Finally, **fifty clasps of gold** were made so they two sets of curtains could be joined together in the middle. They were made of **gold** as everything else in the Holy and Most Holy Place. As we move away from these rooms the preciousness of the metal used decreases but here these are the innermost curtains, highly adorned and visible within the Holy and Most Holy Place so gold is used. When these two sets of curtains were clasped together they and everything within formed what is called the Tabernacle Proper (*miskan*). The outer curtains on top of these were technically a part of the Tent (*ohel*) but not a part of the Tabernacle. As you can see from our picture this curtain was larger than the top of the sanctuary and the excess probably hung on the outside on both north, south and western sides coming within 1.5 feet of the ground. The edges of the curtains hanging down were fastened to pegs affixed to the boards so that if you were inside you only saw these curtains on the ceiling.

b. Tent Curtains of Goats Hair (26:7-14)

A second curtain made of goats hair made up the tent (*ohel*) curtains which covered and protected the Tabernacle Proper. Each curtain was made of **goats' hair**. Solomon's likened his bride's hair to a "flock of goats" (SoSol 4:1; 6:5). This was a compliment because **goats' hair** was black, silky and full. These curtains were made in much the same way as the previous curtains except they were a little larger.

Exodus 26:7-14 "Then you shall make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; you shall make eleven curtains in all. "The length of each curtain *shall be* thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; the eleven curtains shall have the same measurements. "You shall join five curtains by themselves and the *other* six curtains by themselves, and you shall double over the sixth curtain at the front of the tent. "You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the *first* set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain *that is outermost* in the second set. "You shall make fifty clasps of bronze, and you shall put the clasps into the loops and join the tent together so that it will be a unit. "The overlapping part that is left over in the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that is left over, shall lap over the back of the tabernacle. "The cubit on one side and the cubit on the other, of what is left over in the length of the curtains of the tent, shall lap over the sides of the tabernacle on one side and on the other, to cover it. "You shall make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red and a covering of porpoise skins above.



Here we are concerned with **a tent over the tabernacle** because, remember, the Tabernacle Proper only includes the first ornate curtain. So, this is a **tent over the tabernacle** which will cover and protect it. For this they made **eleven curtains in all**. Each one was 45 feet in length and 6 feet in width. So, each was 3 feet longer than the Tabernacle curtains. **five** of these **curtains** were then sewn together lengthwise. The other **six curtains** were also sewn together lengthwise so you have **two sets**. Along the **outermost** edge of each set they were to sew **fifty loops**, presumably of goats' hair for a total of one hundred **loops**. Also they should **make fifty clasps of bronze** (rather than gold) so they could **join the tent together to make a single unit**. Since this curtain was larger than the tabernacle curtains and the sanctuary itself it hung over the sides and even touched the ground in the back. Probably small nails were used to keep it in place along the back and sides.

Verse 9 is a bit enigmatic. It says **and you shall double over the sixth curtain at the front of the tent**. This was the **curtain** located at the entrance into the sanctuary (east side). What the text means is that 3 feet should hang over the front and be tucked under the tabernacle curtain to protect it. This meant that when all was said and done the gold clasps on the tabernacle curtain and the bronze clasps on the tent curtain near the middle did not overlap. The gold clasps would be directly against a black background of goats' hair.

Finally, verse 14 mentions two covers. These are not curtains like the previous two but covers. First, **You shall make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red**. As the text says, this is **a covering for the tent**, that is, the tent made of goats hair. Even today the Bedouins spread skins over their tents and most commonly they are **dyed red** so the sacred tent can be seen from a great distance. The size of this cover is not mentioned. Rabbinic tradition says it measured 15 feet by 45 feet, so that it lay flat on the roof of the sanctuary.

Still another cover is mentioned, **a covering of porpoise skins above**. Some translations say "badger" but they are not found there. Probably this is either porpoise (eastern Mediterranean) or dugong skins (Red Sea). Some say this was actually a container to pack the curtains when they journeyed from place to place and others say it was an actual cover. Numbers 4:6ff says that

when they packed up the Tabernacle furnishings they were covered in **porpoise skins**. So, this may have been a container made to transport everything safely.

In the end, if you walked inside the sanctuary you would see the golden furnishings, golden walls, and a ceiling of intricately woven linen cherubim in violet-blue, violet-red and crimson. “Anyone inside the tabernacle looking upward would see the cherubim, which symbolized the celestial throne of God, and he would also see the gold clasps, in which, too, there was an allusion to the heavens, as the sages of the Talmud already realized...’and the clasps appeared in the tabernacle like stars in the sky.” (cf Cassuto, 352) So, by way of décor the sanctuary was a microcosm of the macrocosm and God was in the midst of His people.

2. The Boards (26:15-30)

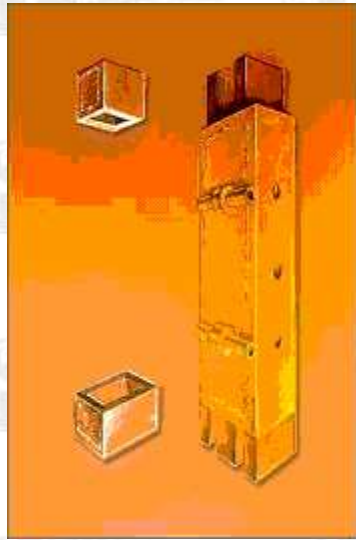
The boards that compose the walls of the tabernacle are described next. The best way to envision this is to envision a golden fence with stretchers on the inside.

Exodus 26:15-30 “Then you shall make the boards for the tabernacle of acacia wood, standing upright. “Ten cubits *shall be* the length of each board and one and a half cubits the width of each board. “*There shall be* two tenons for each board, fitted to one another; thus you shall do for all the boards of the tabernacle. “You shall make the boards for the tabernacle: twenty boards for the south side. “You shall make forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards, two sockets under one board for its two tenons and two sockets under another board for its two tenons; and for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, twenty boards, and their forty sockets of silver; two sockets under one board and two sockets under another board. “For the rear of the tabernacle, to the west, you shall make six boards. “You shall make two boards for the corners of the tabernacle at the rear. “They shall be double beneath, and together they shall be complete to its top to the first ring; thus it shall be with both of them: they shall form the two corners. “There shall be eight boards with their sockets of silver, sixteen

sockets; two sockets under one board and two sockets under another board. “Then you shall make bars of acacia wood, five for the boards of one side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the side of the tabernacle for the rear *side* to the west. “The middle bar in the center of the boards shall pass through from end to end. “You shall overlay the boards with gold and make their rings of gold *as* holders for the bars; and you shall overlay the bars with gold. “Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to its plan which you have been shown in the mountain.

From the last verse we know we don't have every detail here. Moses had to put it all together **according to the plan** he saw on **the mountain**. So, we'll do the best we can to reconstruct what Moses saw. In verses 15-17 the construction of each board is described. Each board was made of **acacia wood** just like the Ark of the Covenant, the table of showbread and the incense altar. Each **board** was 15 feet tall and 2 feet 3 inches wide. The thickness is not mentioned. The Talmud assumes they were 2 feet 3 inches thick. Josephus says they were four fingers thick (~3 inches).ⁱⁱⁱ Probably Josephus was correct and the thickness is not mentioned it was inconsequential. Each board was not laid on its side but stood **upright** butted right up against the next board like a privacy fence.

Each board was to have **two tenons** at its base. **tenons** were vertical projections used to make a joint and each board was to have two of these coming out of its base. This picture portrays three tenons rather than two.



In verses 18-21 the number of boards and sockets for the north and south side is revealed as the same. On the south side, literally the Hebrew says “toward the Negev”, there were to be twenty boards and also on the north side. Since each board was two feet three inches wide the entire length of the tabernacle was forty-five feet. So the boards would stay in place the projections at the base (i.e. tenons) were inserted into silver sockets. Each socket weighed ~75 pounds and two were required for each board. In all there were 100 silver sockets which is 7,500 pounds of silver. Where did they receive such wealth? Egypt (Exod 11:2-3). Likely the boards weighed much less than the two sockets so they would have a firm base. Each board fit into two of these heavy silver sockets like door hinges.

On the west side, literally it reads *yam* which refers to the side nearest the “sea”, that is, the Mediterranean Sea. Wherever the Israelites camped the Tabernacle was set up in the same orientation. So, this refers to the wall behind the Holy of Holies on the west. For this wall there were **six boards** of the same kind and **two distinct boards** for the two corners. The enigmatic description of the **two corner boards** can be explained as follows. When it says **they shall be double beneath**, it means the corner boards fit the wall boards like a dining table fits together. On one side you have wooden projections and on the other side you have holes and they slide together. So, either the corner board had holes and the adjacent boards had projections or the corner board had projections and the adjacent boards had holes. Either way this allowed them to fit together at the bottom and the top. This is why it says **they shall be complete to its top**. This went all the way up to the

first ring. The **first ring** was a ring which fit around all three boards in the corner to further strengthen the corners since they were like cornerstones.

The corner boards were probably only nine inches wide so that the total width of the outside of the tabernacle was 10 cubits or 15 feet. Each board was overlaid with gold, hammered out gold, that is, plates of gold that were then nailed to the acacia wood underneath to hold them in place. So, the interior walls of the sanctuary were gold.

Also it had **bars**, verses 26-30, that added stability to the walls. These were like stretchers. These bars provided more stability and kept the boards from bowing. The **bars** were made **of acacia wood**, and there were **five bars** for each **side of the tabernacle**. The one in the middle was long and ran the entire length of the wall which was 45 feet on the north and south and 15 feet on the west. So, what we have are three rows of stretchers, two meeting together on top, two meeting together on the bottom and one very long stretcher running the entire length of the wall in the middle.

Of course, each **bar** was made of acacia wood and overlaid with **gold**. There were also **gold rings** attached to the boards to hold the **bars**. Finally Moses is told, “**Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to its plan which you have been shown in the mountain**, which statement accounts for the details that cannot be understood from the verbal revelation.^{iv}



3. The Veil (26:31-32)

Exodus 26:31-32 “You shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim, the work of a skillful workman. “You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, their hooks *also being of gold*, on four sockets of silver.

The **veil** in Hebrew is the *paroket* which was a curtain made of **fine twisted linen** that had been dyed **blue**, “violet-purple”, **purple**, “red-purple” and **scarlet** a “deep crimson red”. These deep colors were the most expensive dyes in the ancient world. The dyed linen was to be **twisted** so that it pictured **cherubim**. It was to be **the work of a skillful workman**. The Hebrew means a “creative artist”. They would have to creatively figure out how to weave **cherubim** out of the dyed linens by twisting them together. It would match the ceiling.

The **veil** was to be hung on **four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold**. These were much like the boards for the walls. They had **hooks of gold** on them to hang the veil (kind of like a shower curtain) and the bases of the four pillars were **four sockets of silver**, each weighing 75 pounds. The **four pillars** were spaced equally across the 15 feet and so it would be impossible to move the ark into the holy of holies after they were in place. This would provide a measure of protection from the Ark being stolen.

Significance of the Veil. Again, very few commentators identify all the parts as types of Christ, etc... J. Vernon McGee sees types in everything. Scofield also sees types in everything. The KJV Bible Commentary also sees some types. This seems to be an old carry-over from allegorical interpretation. I prefer to be very careful here and not assign types unless the NT is clear about the type.

In the OT the veil denied access to God for everyone except the high priest. When he entered it on the Day of Atonement he entered with great trembling. But in the NT this has all changed. Now we can draw near to God with confidence because of the crucifixion of Christ’s body which was typified by the veil. When Christ died the veil was rent from top to bottom and believers now have free access to God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Now we do not have to approach with fear and trembling but with confidence that we are accepted because Christ is our acceptance (cf Heb 10:19-20).

D. The Placement of the Furniture (26:33-37)

The point of this section is to reveal where everything that had been made should be placed.

1. The Veil (26:33)

Exodus 26:33 “You shall hang up the veil under the clasps, and shall bring in the ark of the testimony there within the veil; and the veil shall serve for you as a partition between the holy place and the holy of holies.

This is not describing the order in which things should be placed in the Tabernacle, only their position because it would be impossible to take the **ark** into the holy of holies after the pillars and veil were in place. The point is that the veil was to be hung **under the clasps** or hooks so that the gold-covered pillars would not be visible inside the holy of holies. Inside the holy of holies you would only see the gold walls on three sides and the veil on the fourth side. The room was exactly 15 feet in length, 15 feet in width and 15 feet in height, a perfect cube. The holy of holies in Solomon’s Temple was 30 feet in length, 30 feet in width and 30 feet in height, a perfect cube (1 Kings 6:20). The new Jerusalem will be 1,500 miles in length, 1,500 miles in width and 1,500 miles in height, a perfect cube (Rev 21:16). Each cubed room or space where the Shechinah of God dwells is an enlargement of the former.

The veil (*paroket*) in the Tabernacle and Solomon’s Temple served as a separation between the **holy place and the holy of holies**.

2. The Ark of the Covenant (26:34)

Exodus 26:34 “You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the holy of holies.

This was the only piece of furniture in the holy of holies and the mercy seat here is the atonement seat where the blood was sprinkled once a year by the high priest to provide ritual cleanness for the nation of Israel so Shechinah

could remain in Israel's presence and Israel could worship in Shechinah's presence.

3. The Table of the Showbread and the Lampstand (26:35)

Exodus 26:35“You shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand opposite the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south; and you shall put the table on the north side.

As per the **table** of showbread it was **outside the veil** in the holy place. This room was 15 feet in width and 30 feet in length. The **table** was placed on the north side and the **menorah** directly across from it on the south side.

4 The Screen (26:36-37)

Exodus 26:36-37“You shall make a screen for the doorway of the tent of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen, the work of a weaver. “You shall make five pillars of acacia for the screen and overlay them with gold, their hooks *also being of gold*; and you shall cast five sockets of bronze for them.

Finally, the **screen** at the entryway to the holy place. The word **screen** is *macak* and means “curtain covering defenses”. It is different from the word used of the “veil” in verse 31. This is *macak* and that was *paroket*. The difference is clear in the Hebrew but the LXX translators translated both by the same Greek word *katapetasma* and so every time in the NT Greek when the veil is mentioned it is difficult to tell in the NT which curtain is being referred to. Whatever the case the veil also served as a screen but the screen did not serve as the veil. There is a special significance of the veil. Several times both of these words are used of the veil. For example, it says in

Exodus 40:21 He brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up a veil for the screen, and screened off the ark of the testimony, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

So, it seems that the veil served as a screen but was more than a screen. Returning to the text, the **screen** was made of the same **fine twisted linen** dyed with the same three colors. The difference is that there were no cherubim and the work was done by a weaver not a creative artist.

Lastly, there were **five pillars of acacia made** for the **screen** to hang on. This is one more pillar than those that separated the holy place from the most holy. This would add a measure of protection from the ark which would not fit between the pillars. These five pillars of acacia were also covered in gold and the screen was on the inside so the gold pillars could be seen from the courtyard. Another difference is the **sockets**. All the other sockets are made of silver but these were made of **bronze** because these were also a part of the courtyard and everything in the courtyard is made of bronze.

So, we start with gold in the innermost chambers, then silver around the edges at the base and finally bronze for the courtyard. Everything was done to immaculate precision because of the holiness of God. “Anyone inside the tabernacle looking upward would see the cherubim, which symbolized the celestial throne of God, and he would also see the gold clasps, in which, too, there was an allusion to the heavens, as the sages of the Talmud already realized...’and the clasps appeared in the tabernacle like stars in the sky” (cf Cassuto, 352). The overall impression of one who entered the Tabernacle would be that he had entered a microcosm of the macrocosm where God dwelled in the midst of His people.

ⁱ For a complete description by a first century Jewish historian see Josephus, Antiquities III, vi, 1-8.

ⁱⁱ Upon this its cover were two images, which the Hebrews call Cherubims; they are flying creatures, but their form is not like to that of any of the creatures which men have seen, though Moses said he had seen such beings near the throne of God. (Josephus, Antiquities III, vi, 5).

ⁱⁱⁱ Josephus, Antiquities III, vi, 3.

^{iv} The Temple Institute says, “The tabernacle beams, (*krashim*), were made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. At the top of the beam were three tenons and at the bottom, a double tenon. The beams were adjoined at the top by silver sockets, (*taba’ot*), that fit over the tenons. The double tenon at the foot of each beam were inserted into silver sockets, (*adanim*), that served as a base for the wall. For additional support, bolts were inserted into gold rings placed along the length of the beams.”

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