

# Exodus – Lesson 19

## Constructing the Tabernacle – Part 2

### Read Exodus 26:1-27:21

1. (a) From Exodus 26:1-6, briefly describe the *curtains* that would be used to form the tabernacle.

Ten curtains of 28 cubits long (42') by 4 cubits wide (6') would be used to form the tabernacle. The curtains would be attached together on their long ends, and would be draped over the top and attached together. The curtains were made of fine twined linen and purple, blue, and scarlet yarns. Loops of fabric were attached to one edge of one curtain and the two sets were connected together with golden clasps.

- (b) What is the significance of the fact that these curtains were blue, purple, and scarlet in *color*?

The colors, and more specifically purple, represent royalty. Purple dye, which was extracted from the shells of mollusks of the Mediterranean by the Philistines, was difficult to come by and very expensive. Therefore, it was used by only the very rich, including royalty. By using these colors in the curtains, the tabernacle would send the message that it was “occupied” by a king. These would become customary colors to represent God; the priests wore similar colored garments (Exo. 39:1). Purple was used to decorate palaces (Esther 1), Jesus was clothed in a purple “robe” when he was mocked as the “king of the Jews” (Mark 15:17), the rich man in Jesus’ parable was clothed in purple to indicate his wealth and happiness in this life (Luke 16:19), Lydia was a seller of purple cloth (Acts 16:14), and the prostitute of Revelation 17 wears purple to symbolize the materialism and immorality of the nations.

- (c) Given that a cubit was about 18 inches, what is the approximate size of the tabernacle in width and height, based on the number and sizes of the curtains?

Given that 5 curtains were used to form the length, and that each curtain was 4 cubits wide, the entire length would be about 30' (some suggest a length of 45' based on the frames). The width of the tabernacle, with the drapes over its top would be approximately 10', given that the height was approximately 15' (based on the height of each frame; v. 16). So, the interior of the tabernacle would measure about 30' long, 10' wide, and 15' high. The Holy of Holies inside would be approximately ½ that total size, 15' x 10' (some suggest a square 10' x 10'). Unfortunately, there seems to be little consensus on its size given the rather cryptic nature of its description in this text.

2. What kind of *roof* was to be constructed over the tabernacle, according to vv. 7-14?

A roof of goats hair was to be constructed over the top of the tabernacle, a series of eleven curtains attached together which would cover the tent and protect the curtains underneath. Woven goats hair would be waterproof and provide a leak-free environment; they would hang over the front and back to protect these sides from water and sun. The curtains were to be connected together with bronze clasps. An additional layer of tanned ram skins and a layer of goat skins would be also be added for extra protection.

3. (a) From Exodus 26:15-30, briefly describe the *frame* to be constructed for the tabernacle.

The frame was to be constructed of acacia wood overlaid with gold; each frame piece would be 10 cubits (15') high and 1½ cubits (27") wide. The frames would be attached together with silver tenons and would stand in silver bases. 20 frames would be used on each of the long sides, with 8 frames used at the front and rear. Support bars would also be constructed of acacia wood overlaid with gold which would run from end to end and support the structure.

(b) What *practical* significance is there in the choice of metals used for the curtain rings (see v. 6), the roof clasps (see v. 11), and the frame bases (see v. 19)?

The curtain rings were to be made of gold, while the roof clasps would be made of bronze and the frame bases out of silver. The gold of the curtain rings would be appropriate, given that they are attaching the “royal” curtains together. Gold, however, is quite malleable, so it would not work well for holding together the roof curtains or the frames; the use of bronze, a much harder metal, would be necessary to hold the roof curtains together. Silver, a tougher metal than gold, but lighter than bronze, would work well for the frames. Gold would not work well for the frame bases, given its weight; since the entire structure had to be carried, the lighter metal would work better for the large bases.

4. (a) From Exodus 26:31-35, briefly describe the *veil* that hung inside the tabernacle.

The veil would be constructed of the same material as the main tabernacle, linen woven with purple, blue, and scarlet yarns. This veil would also have cherubim woven into it as a pattern, and hang down from golden clasps on a frame of gold-overlaid acacia wood. It would separate the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place, effectively dividing the tabernacle into two rooms.

(b) What does it mean that “*cherubim [were] skillfully worked into [the veil]?*” Why is this important?

The cherubim were woven into the curtains and the veil; they were either offset by color to make the appearance of an angelic being or they were a raised pattern embroidered into the fabric, or a combination of both. The cherubim, like those above the mercy seat, represented the *presence* of God within the tabernacle and behind the curtain. The cherubim would remind those approaching the tabernacle, and the Most Holy Place that God was present there. Just as the seraphim of Isaiah 6 flew above the throne of God singing “*holy, holy, holy,*” the cherubim would “fly” above the testimony on the mercy seat and in front of the Holy of Holies, both representing the presence of God himself and his holiness.

(c) What two rooms are contained *inside* the tabernacle? What is contained in each room?

The first room through the opening into the tabernacle was known as the Holy Place. It contained the table of the showbread and the golden lampstand. The priests were able to enter here, although the primary usage was for the High Priests. Inside of the veil was the Most Holy Place (or the Holy of Holies). Only the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat was contained in here and only the High Priest could enter in and then only once a year. The golden lampstand provided ambient light for the Holy Place and illuminated the table, but no light (other than God himself) was visible in the Most Holy Place.

5. From Exodus 27:1-8, briefly describe the *altar*. Where was the altar to be placed in relation to the tabernacle?

The altar was to be a hollow box made of acacia wood and covered with bronze. It was to be 5 cubits (90” or 7½’) square and 3 cubits (54” or 4½’) tall. It was to have horns on its corners. Various sacrificial implements, including pots, shovels, basins, forks, and fire pans were all to be made out of bronze and stored inside the altar when it traveled. It was to have a grating made of bronze that extended over the altar down one side about half way. The altar would be carried with poles overlaid with bronze that were fed through rings on its sides (similar to the ark). The altar was to be placed *outside* the tabernacle in the courtyard directly in front of the opening to the tabernacle. The priest would *face* the tabernacle when making a burnt offering to the Lord; having the altar outside the tabernacle would be important, since fire *inside* the tabernacle would not be a good idea (given that the entire structure was highly flammable).

6. From Exodus 27:9-19, briefly describe the *courtyard* that surrounded the tabernacle. How big was it?

**The courtyard that surrounded the tabernacle was to be formed using fine twined linens that were stretched between pillars of wood with bronze bases. The entire structure measured 100 cubits (150') long and 50 cubits (75') wide. The length of the structure ran west to east, with an opening on the east side measuring 20 cubits (30') wide containing a gate made of fine linen and purple, blue, and scarlet yarns (similar to the tabernacle tent and veil); the gate would have intricate needlework embroidery. In front of the gate would stand four pillars filleted with silver.**

7. According to Exodus 27:20-21, what kind of *oil* was to be used for the lampstand? Where was the lampstand to be placed? Why was it to burn *perpetually*?

**The oil of the lampstand was to be pure beaten olive oil, provided by the people as a *freewill* offering to the tabernacle. The lampstand would reside in the Holy Place, outside of the Holy of Holies. The priests (i.e. Aaron and his sons) would tend the lamps to assure that they burned perpetually. This perpetual light would symbolize the *ever-present* nature of God residing in the tabernacle and present with the people of Israel. It would also represent the *revelation* of God – note that it was to be “*before the testimony*” (v. 21), indicating that its light represented the full knowledge of God as he revealed himself to the people.**