

# The Curtains and the Coverings of the Tabernacle

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*The Gospel in the Tabernacle*

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In our study of the tabernacle over the last number of weeks, we have looked at different aspects of the tabernacle. We've looked at its perimeter, a perimeter that went right around the structure that was there erected in the wilderness. We have considered some of the details concerning the different aspects of the furniture that were in the tabernacle. We noticed their significance and their purpose in the whole plan of salvation. The way that we have considered the tabernacle is really the way that the Israelites would have perceived it. Starting out in the wilderness where they lived, the worshiper would have, firstly, come to the gate; then on entering the gate, they would have come to the court where there was the altar and the laver; and then going further on, they would have come into the tent of the tabernacle where was found the table of shewbread, the candlestick, and the altar of incense; and then although unable to enter in, there was further on the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat and the Holiest of All. As we have noted on a number of occasions, this order is all significant and it is very important. It taught the people of Israel the way of salvation and the blessings that the believer enjoys in life in fellowship with God. This order was very significant and had a point to it and led to something, and we also see that toward Israel, that if they came to God, then they would in eternity end up in God's immediate presence. That is what the Holiest of All speaks about. We end the journey of life or if we come through the journey of life and enter in by Christ and go the way of his salvation, then in eternity we shall enter heaven itself, the Holiest of All, and there we will dwell with the Lord.

So our approach and study in the tabernacle has followed the path of an Israelite, the path an Israelite would have taken starting from the outside and coming gradually to the inside. This evening as we come to look at another important aspect in the tabernacle, I want us to consider together the curtains and coverings. The curtains and coverings. We have read about it here in Exodus 26. The tabernacle that was found within the court and consisted of the holy place and the Holiest of All was, in effect, a tent, a tent that was made up of curtains and coverings. The instructions concerning these curtains were given by God. They had to be made of a certain material, a particular color, and a specific shape, and so God gave strict instructions, precise detail and, of course, we can say this with every aspect of the tabernacle. God gave very precise and strict instructions how it was to be constructed, what it was to be made of, the shape it would take, and its format,

and the reason for this was God in all of these things was teaching Israel spiritual truths; teaching Israel the way of salvation, how they could come to have their sins forgiven, how they could come to know God, how they could come to meet with him.

The precise detail given right throughout the construction of the tabernacle taught Israel that their salvation was not open whatsoever to man's interpretation or to man's design or to man's plan. This was made very very clear to them. God told them on a number of occasions, "Be careful that you follow it, follow the pattern that I showed you in the mount," and God was saying to them, "My salvation, coming to meet with me, coming to know me, is a very precise thing and the only way you can come is you follow my detailed instructions." The way of salvation, of course, the redemption of man is the design of God and we, too, learn the very same thing. We can only come to know God, we can only come to enjoy God and meet with God, when we stick rigidly to what God has revealed in his word.

The word of God, the Scriptures, reveal to us God's way of salvation and so how carefully and how conscientiously we must listen to what God says in his word. The Scriptures, we cannot come to God any old way or think we can approach God in some way that pleases us. We simply cannot. Imagine Israel throwing something out or Adam something in here. God had given these strict instructions, what they were to do, and where the altar was to be set and the laver and the candlestick and the table of shewbread, all of these things, but imagine Israel come along and they said, "Listen, you, I'm going to rearrange things here. I think we'll put the altar on the inside and move the laver to the outside." The whole thing, there would be confusion. It would be a mess. They would never have come to meet with God. God would not have descended upon the mercy seat.

As we think of this, we would easily think of how it would be crazy because there was order, there was sense. It was God revealing how man could come and meet with him. And yet this is exactly what people do today. God has spoken in his word, God has shown us how we can know him, how we can meet with him, how we can be saved and have our sins forgiven, but how many, how many feel that they're perfectly entitled to just dismiss what God says and they think they can come and meet with God in a way that pleases them; they can worship God in the order that they desire. How foolish. How foolish they are. The way of salvation is that way that God has revealed and there's no other way. There's no other way to come and meet with God.

As we come to think of the curtains themselves, we are changing direction here. As we have journeyed into the tabernacle, we have taken the position of an Israelite, as we have said, we've been thinking on a horizontal plane, the Israelite coming and moving in from one piece of furniture to the other, and so therefore would have been thinking on the horizontal plane. But this evening as we come to the curtains and coverings, I want us to think upon the vertical plane, not moving in gradually but moving down gradually. The curtains and coverings were that which descended over the top of the tabernacle and that's what they did, they were that which was pulled down over the tabernacle. They descended upon it and they point to how Christ has descended into this world. That's what they speak about, how Christ has descended down into this world. In John 1:14 it

tells us, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." The word "dwelt" in John 1:14 means the tabernacle and so what Christ did as he entered into this world was he came down to tabernacle amongst us. He descended into this world. Therefore tonight we're not taking the position of an Israelite entering in but we're thinking of God's Son himself coming down, descending into this world.

I want us tonight to start again at the outside and to journey inward into the tabernacle. Of course as God gives the instructions here, he starts on the inside and he works out and that's how God works in salvation, but tonight I want us to work from the outside in again and I want us to see how these curtains, how these coverings, teach us of how Christ ascended into this world and became man and dwelt among us, tabernacled amongst us.

The tabernacle was covered with four layers. The inner two layers are referred to as curtains. We have this in verses 1 to 13. The outer two layers are called coverings and we have this recorded for us in verse 14. I want us to examine each layer and see what it teaches us of Christ as he descended into this world.

The first layer that I want us to notice this evening is the badgers' skin and the badgers' skin points us to the poverty entered into by Christ. The poverty entered into by Christ. We read about it in verse 14. It says,

14 And thou shalt make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red,  
and a covering above of badgers' skins.

The outermost covering of the tabernacle was made of a material that God's word calls badgers' skin. Now the badgers' skin described here is not a reference to the skin of that black and white animal that we know today as a badger that is a pest and a nuisance and carries disease. We're not sure what animal is referred to here but the word translated "badger" in verse 14 refers to the color of the skin rather than the animal itself, and the color it speaks of is a dark gray color. It was a drab, a dull color, a leather-like substance. This is what the children of Israel made their shoes from. They made their shoes out of badgers' skin. God told Israel in Ezekiel 16:10, "I clothed thee also with brodered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin." And so this is what Israel used to make their shoes, they made badgers' skin. As they brought the materials to make the tabernacle, they would have offered their shoe-leather for what is designated here badgers' skin.

So the badgers' skin referred to here was strong and durable, but outwardly it was unattractive. Yes, it was a strong material, it was a waterproof material, but it was unattractive and practically was able to cope with all the elements of the world. It could withstand the heat and the cold, the sun and the rain, but to the passerby, badgers' skin, the skin that covered the tabernacle, caused it to appear unappealing and even not noteworthy. The badgers' skin hid all the wondrous and majestic sights contained in the tabernacle from view.

As we think, then, of Christ coming into this world, that was exactly how the world viewed him. The prophet Isaiah referring to Christ coming into this world says in Isaiah

53:2-3, "he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men." This is speaking about Christ's physical appearance as he descended into this world. He did not come in the garments of a king. He did not ride the clouds of glory and come in great triumph into this world. No, he came in humility and in lowliness as he came to tabernacle amongst us. He was born into the lowest and poorest of circumstances. The truth is he possessed such quality that he was able to resist and repel everything that the sinful world brought against him. He was Almighty God. He was the omnipotent one, the one who was from eternity, the self-existing one.

That's who he was and that's who he is but the sinful man living in this world, they see nothing in Christ that merit another glance. Absolutely nothing. He was dull and he was drab to this sinful world. John's Gospel in 1:10, it says, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." They had just seen him as another man. Less than that. Christ was looked upon as a despised man. Despised. The Pharisees said that Christ in John 8:41, "We be not born of fornication," and that was a slur against Christ. These sinful wicked men attacked Christ and his virgin birth. It was a slander, "We be not born of fornication." As Christ spoke to them about his Father in heaven, they were implying Christ was born out of wedlock and so we see here how they slandered God's holy Son. They see no beauty, no merit in him. One that was despised. One that was unworthy.

God's word does not contain any details concerning the size or dimension of the badgers' skin and that detail is significant when we consider how precisely other details are given here concerning the tabernacle. Every detail is given very much precisely and very accurately, and yet we're given no size concerning the badgers' skin. No dimensions. No shape. It reminds us that Christ's humility and the extent of his poverty as he descended from glory to tabernacle among men, is beyond human comprehension, beyond that which we can understand how Christ humbled himself, how he is the King of glory who humbled himself and entered into this lowly estate. He entered into poverty itself.

Paul summed it up well when he said in 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." What riches Christ has and yet what poverty he entered into to save that which is lost. He who is the high and the lofty one came down in the position of a servant, that lowly position so we who deserve his wrath and curse might be drawn out the pit from which we had fallen.

So we see here in the badgers' skin the poverty Christ entered into, his humility, his lowliness. Christ descending into this world and becoming flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone. How lowly, how humble Christ was and how despised and rejected he was of men. The poverty he entered into.

Then notice secondly here: the pain endured by Christ. Not only the poverty he entered into but the pain endured by Christ in the second layer, because verse 14 tells us,

14 And thou shalt make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red.

Under the badgers' skin another covering covered the tabernacle. It was the covering of rams' skin dyed red. Everything about this covering spoke of suffering, sacrifice, and substitution. That's what the ram speaks about. It speaks about suffering and about sacrifice and about substitution. The ram is the animal in Scripture that points to the work of substitution. When Abraham was about to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering and the angel of the Lord stopped him, Genesis 22:13 tells us of the substitute. It says there, "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." Notice it was the ram offered instead of a son. The ram was taken, Abraham laid his hands upon the ram and placed the ram upon the altar that his son was originally placed upon.

It was the substitute dying in the stead of the son and so the ram points to substitution. The skins mentioned here emphasize the sacrifice, that sacrifice was made. The animal's life was sacrificed to obtain the skin to make a covering and so the ram speaks about sacrifice as well as substitution. Then these skins were dyed red, speaking of suffering, speaking about pain, speaking about blood-shedding. The second covering over the tabernacle which went onto the badgers' skin represents pain and punishment.

So we then come to consider our Savior and his coming into this world to tabernacle amongst man, his descent which involved him first entering into great poverty, secondly involved the Savior entering grief and personal pain. His work was the work of the substitute to suffer and to make sacrifice for his people. That was what his work was. That is what he came to do. That is the course his Father had set him, a course of pain, a course of sacrifice.

So the rams' skin dyed red speaks about the pain Christ endured as the holy and sinless Son of God lived in this world. His life was a life that was full of suffering. He suffered all his life. As we think of how he lived in this sinful and this corrupt world, that in itself would have been a torment to his holy and his pure and his sinless mind. As he lived amongst men, men that blasphemed openly, men that mocked him, men that rejected him, how that would have been a torment to him. As we see the wickedness of men today, how often we are grieved when we see our nation and how those within it promote wickedness, our hearts are grieved, we are disturbed, then how much more would God's holy Son whose very law has been broken, whose very word has been dismissed? How he would have been grieved. It would have been such a mental torment. There is an anguish of the soul to live in this sinful world. God's holy Son descending down to the place of poverty and living amongst sinful men and a sinful and corrupt world.

Christ not only suffered because of the sinful surroundings that he was now in, but he also suffered at the hands of sinful men. They plotted against him. They falsely accused him, mocked and beat him and then crucified him. Christ's whole life and every aspect of his life was a life of suffering. Of course, he came to atone for sin, he came to make a payment for sin, and this payment was being made in every part of his life, in all of his

sufferings there is the aspect of redemption, of payment. Christ died the worst of deaths, a death of unsurpassed suffering. Unsurpassed suffering. He endured not only the very brutal cruelty of men but he endured the wrath of God.

It was a sacrificial death, a death in which he sacrificed himself and offered himself to God as sacrifice to satisfy divine justice. The book of Hebrews tells us Christ who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God. He was a sacrifice offered to God. It was a substitutionary death. 1 Peter 3:18 declares, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust," or instead of the unjust, "that he might bring us to God." So Christ came from the heights of glory into this world. As he entered into this world, he not only entered into our poverty but he also endured the pain that we deserved. He endured the punishment for sin, the pain that was rightfully ours. The extent of his pain and suffering is something that no man will ever understand or comprehend.

You see, like the badgers' skin, the rams' skin dyed red, God does not give any dimensions or size. The suffering and sacrifice of Christ as our substitute is something that is without human comprehension and understanding. We will never understand, we will never be able to grasp what God's holy Son endured and that is a wonderful truth for God's people. We will never be able to understand or comprehend the dark night that our Savior passed through ere to save the sheep that were lost. But Christ did it. He endured all of these sufferings, he endured all of these pains that we might be the blessed of God, the redeemed of God, and be those that inherit eternal life.

Those within the tabernacle, they were covered with rams' skin dyed red. They could not explain the size or the extent of that covering, they didn't know it, but they were covered because they entered in and they were covered by the rams' skin dyed red. When we enter into Christ, we cannot explain the great extent of his redemptive work. We will never be able to understand it. It is an inside work but praise the Lord when we enter in, we're covered by it, covered by the blood, covered by the work of Christ and that atonement, that blood-shedding that has been made for our souls, what a covering the atoning work of Christ provides for his people.

So we see here not only the poverty Christ entered into but also you see here the pain that he endured. Then notice also not only these things but notice, thirdly, the penalty accepted by Christ. The penalty accepted by Christ. We have this in verse 7 of Exodus 26. It says there,

7 And thou shalt make curtains of goats' hair to be a covering upon the tabernacle: eleven curtains shalt thou make.

As we travel inward from the outside of the tabernacle, the third layer that covered the tent of the tabernacle was the curtain of goats' hair. This hair would have been taken from the goat and then it would have been spun into thread so that it could be used in fabric to make material. Exodus 35:26 tells us, "And all the women whose heart stirred them up in wisdom spun goats' hair." So this goat hair was gleaned from the goat and then it was spun by the women that it might be used to make fabric.

This goat hair would have been a black color and we learn this from the book of Song of Solomon. If you turn over to the Song of Solomon 1:5, it speaks here about goats' hair was black in color and this is important to note this because there are some arguments about how goats' hair wasn't black in color, but as we compare Scripture with Scripture, it is clear that it was black in color. Solomon in the Song of Solomon in chapter 1, verse 5 tells us, "I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon." Here we read about the tents of Kedar, that they were black. They were black.

These tents were made out of goats' hair and that's what they were made out of in those days, but let's speak about how they were black here and the word "black" actually means "jet black." Jet black, and so goats' hair is a reference to the color black, and so this curtain that went under the rams' skin and under the badgers' skin was a curtain that was black in color. It was jet black and black is the color of judgment. Hell, the place where all unrepentant sinners will be eternally judged or punished for their sin is described in God's word as the place of utter darkness.

So we see blackness and darkness speak about judgment and the penalty for sin, but here we have this black curtain, this black curtain covering the tabernacle. What was God teaching Israel? What is God teaching us by this black goats' hair curtain? What we are brought to see here is that Christ as he came from glory and entered into this world not only entered into poverty, not only endured grief and personal pain, but he also accepted the penalty, the judgment that is the sinner's and he entered death itself, he entered the blackness and the darkness of death.

God's word makes it clear, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The wages of sin is death." God's word is emphatically clear. For those who break the law, they are under the sentence of death. That is their punishment that rests upon their head, death itself, eternal death, separation from God. But Christ as he tabernacled amongst us took that punishment. He bore that penalty. Christ entered into the great blackness of death itself.

This descent that Christ made from glory ended with Christ in the grave and that is what we see here through these different coverings of the tabernacle, Christ's descent into this world and the descent started with his poverty, and then it ended in pain, and went on to proceed to pain, ended in the grave itself in the penalty for sin, the full penalty of Christ dying in our place and in our stead. Christ said of himself in John 10:11, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

This curtain of goats' hair consisted of 11 pieces and these 11 pieces were sewn together into two parts: one part had five pieces, and the other part had six pieces. We see this in verses 8 and 9. Notice what it says there in verses 8 and 9.

8 The length of one curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the breadth of one curtain four cubits: and the eleven curtains shall be all of one measure. 9 And thou shalt couple five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by

themselves, and shalt double the sixth curtain in the forefront of the tabernacle.

So we see this curtain had two main parts: one of the parts consisted of five pieces, the other part consisted of six pieces and then they were joined together to make one complete covering. Six is the number of man. Five is the number of grace. We can say God in grace, God in grace has sent Christ into this world and Christ has been united to our humanity. Why? To take our punishment and to bear our penalty, our judgment, to bear death itself, and that is why Christ entered into this world. That is why Christ in grace was united to man, to enter into death and to suffer death for us; to enter into the blackness and darkness of death in our stead and in our place. Hebrews 2:14 and 15 makes this very clear. It says, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." Notice what it says, Christ took part of the same, he took flesh and blood, he took our humanity. Why? "That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

Christ has descended down into this world, he has taken our humanity, flesh of our flesh, that he might enter death for us and take our punishment and deliver us who were under this terrible penalty of eternal death. Therefore we can now enter in and enjoy life in Christ because Christ has taken this penalty for us. Fellowship with God because Christ has passed through death is a blessed reality and that is exactly what the priest did in the tabernacle. They entered into the tabernacle, we know what it speaks about in the holy place, it speaks about fellowship with God. Why were these people able to have fellowship with God? Because Christ has passed through death for us, entered into death, lay down his life and, of course, he took it again. He took it again and he's in glory, ever living to make intercession for his people. He bore the punishment and took the penalty.

So we see in the goats' hair how it represents Christ descending into death for us, and finally notice with me here in this final curtain, the privileges enjoyed in Christ. The privileges enjoyed in Christ. The first one tells us,

1 Moreover thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them.

We come now to the innermost covering or curtain in the tabernacle, that was the curtain that would have been the actual ceiling of the tent, and so only the priest serving in the tabernacle would have seen it. It would have been the curtain that they looked upon. As we think of these four layers that all represent Christ and his coming down into this world, it is important to note that only two of these four layers were actually seen by the human eye. Only two were seen. The outside layer was seen by all men. Anyone crossing the wilderness and looking in the direction of the tabernacle would have seen this dark, dull covering. It was there for all to see. The two layers that came afterwards were unseen by the human eye, but then the bottom layer was seen by the priests serving in the

tabernacle. So the priest, it speaks about how God's people are represented in the tabernacle. They see this innermost layer. They were the only ones that had seen it.

There were just these two views, in other words, just these two views of the covering or of Christ's coming into this world, the view from the outside and the view from the inside and they represent how all men in this world view Christ. How all men view Christ. Those out of Christ in the wilderness of sin, they view Christ as unattractive. They view Christ as undesirable, as unappealing. They look upon true religion, they look upon the Gospel as dull and drab and unattractive and unappealing in any way. That's how they look upon it. They look upon Christ as not noteworthy whatsoever, those on the outside, but those that have by faith entered into Christ, the view and sight they get of the Savior is altogether different. How different, how strikingly different it is as we stand and view the innermost curtain. It represents all that Christ is to us and all that he has done for us.

We get a wonderful sight of Christ in all his glory. Verse 1 here tells us that this innermost curtain was made of fine twined linen. The word "linen" comes from a Hebrew word meaning "to be bright or to be white." It speaks of a purity and holiness. When we view Christ by faith, we see one who is righteous, one who is holy, one who is pure, one who has got perfect righteousness, righteousness that is able to enable to stand in God's presence and be accepted by God. And that's what the priest sees within the tabernacle as he stood there and looked up to the ceiling and he's seen the white linen. It speaks about the righteousness and the holiness of God. He realized that was what he was covered with as he was able to stand before God there. This linen represents Christ's holiness and righteousness.

The other colors contained in the inner layer are blue, purple and scarlet. Blue speaks of Christ's heavenly nature; the fact that he was very God of very God. Scarlet speaks of his human nature. The name "adam" means "red." That's what "adam" means, "red." And Christ, of course, is the last Adam. The color purple is made from putting together the colors blue and red. It speaks of the King. It speaks of royalty. As we view Christ with the eye of faith, we see one who is both God and man and as the God-man possessing these two natures, he is our King and our Savior. King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is the sight the priest got in the inside of the tabernacle. They were reminded of their Redeemer, of their Savior, the one that was able to give them victory; the one that enabled them to stand in God's presence; the one that was able to subdue all their enemies and overcome sin, their great King and Deliverer.

The curtains of this final layer were made up of 10 pieces sewn together into two parts: five pieces in each part. Verse 3 tells us this,

3 The five curtains shall be coupled together one to another; and other five curtains shall be coupled one to another.

So there were 10 pieces in this curtain: two parts with five pieces in each part. It made up 10 curtains. Ten is the number of completeness. In Christ we are complete. We have a

full and a complete salvation. What a wonderful salvation is found in him who is our Savior and Redeemer, and as the priests looked up when they viewed the 10 pieces, they were conscious that in Christ they were made complete and they were made whole; they had perfect acceptance before God.

Think then of the cherubims woven into this curtain. There were cherubims woven into it. As we noted in the mercy seat, these creatures speak of protection. In Christ we are protected and we are saved for time and eternity. Again, the priests could think of the cherubims, think of how they were saved, they were protected and their salvation was secure.

What privileges there are to be enjoyed in Christ. What a blessed and glorious sight there was for the priest serving in the tabernacle. What a difference from the outside. Outside, the tabernacle looked dull and drab and unattractive, but inside it was so appealing, filled with gold, filled with these glorious colors, filled with these precious things and all speak of Christ and what Christ is to us and what Christ gives us before the throne of grace. But these things could only be viewed from the inside, in other words, they could only be viewed by faith.

What view do you have of Christ tonight? What view do you have of him? There are only two views you can have, just two views as the curtains teach us, the view from the outside, dull, drab, unattractive; or the view from the inside, one who is righteous, one who gives us all that we need to stand in God's presence. Christ said to his disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" You see, that's the all-important question, who is Christ to you tonight? How do you view him? If you view him just as one who is unattractive and dull and drab, then you're not in Christ, you're still in the wilderness of sin, you're still under the condemnation of God, but if tonight you view him as the precious one, because to those that believe, the Bible tells us, he is precious, and to the priest serving in the tabernacle, these things that he served amongst were so precious. To those that are in Christ, he is truly precious, he is valuable, because he gives us acceptance with God.

How do you view Christ tonight? I trust that you will see him as your Savior and as your Redeemer and you will come to see him more and more and view him as the altogether lovely one, the one who is able to give you acceptance with God. May God give each one of us such a sight of our Savior, one of good value and worth. Amen.