

The tabernacle – a tent

1. Well protected and secure

2. Humble outside but colourful inside

• Covered by layers of curtains

• Inner covers – 10 coloured curtains joined 5 at a time

• Second layer of 11 goat skins for protection

• Third layer of rams skins

• Fourth layer of sea-cow hides

The wooden frame

• Acacia wood

• Silver stands

The tabernacle was a tent. It had a framework; and colourful curtains were used to cover that framework and make the 'walls' and 'ceiling' of the tent. Exodus chapter 26 proceeds to describe the coverings^{□1}, the wooden frame^{□2}, the veil and the screen^{□3}. It is complicated and obscure, but the overall impact of Exodus 26 is to leave us with two main impressions.

1. Although the structure was not a solid building, yet it was well protected and secure in its own way. It had a firm framework, and its outer coverings were well able to protect the inside from the wind and rain that might come upon it. It would not always be in the dry Sinai area; for many years it would be in Israel, and subject to wind and rain.

2. It was humble and unostentatious from the outside but colourful when viewed from the inside. The priests and high-priest inside would be able to see the colours and the embroidery; people looking at the outside would see nothing but the unexciting outer layer. It will take some patience to consider the details, but we shall attempt to do so.

Consider the coverings of the tabernacle. Moses was told to have made ten curtains^{□1}. In colour, they were blue, purple and bright red, and had cherubim figures embroidered on to them (visible from the inside of the tabernacle). They were twenty-eight cubits by four cubits in size (about 13 by 1.8 metres^{□2}). They were joined together, five at a time, so as to make two curtains of twenty-eight by twenty cubits (about 13 by 9 metres^{□3}). The two large rectangular covers were laid over the entire tabernacle with its two rooms. Each five-fold cover had blue sashes at the ends^{□4} and had fifty loops^{□5} to be attached to fifty clasps on the tabernacle^{□6}.

There was another set of curtains to lay over these inner covers. Goatskins formed the next covering over the framework of the tent^{□1}. There were eleven of them. They were put together in the same way as the inner covers^{□2} but were slightly longer. The extra length made a rear 'wall' for the back of the tabernacle^{□3}, and enabled the goatskin cover to hang a cubit lower than colourful inner materials^{□4}. It gave thorough protection for the inner coverings.

Then there were more coverings of rams' skins and the hides of sea cows^{□1}. It seems they were placed over the goat-hair coverings and gave further protection to the structure.

So the whole structure had four coverings: (i) inner fabrics of brightly coloured materials, blue, purple and red, with cherubim figures embroidered on to them; (ii) goat-hair curtains; (iii) covering made of rams' skins and (iv) covering made of the hides of sea cows.

Next, the **wooden frame** is described. The 'walls' of the tent consisted only of the fabrics. But there was a frame over which the curtains were placed^{□1}. The frame consisted of forty-eight rectangles of acacia wood, each one ten cubits high (just under five metres) and one-and-a-half cubits (0.7 metres) wide. There was enough of them to go right around the building, twenty for each long side, six for the end, and two for the end where the entrance was to be situated^{□2}. Each rectangular frame had a projection sticking out from it at the bottom, so as to be able to fit into silver stands to hold the frames^{□3}. It seems that the eight frames at the two ends of the tent, with their sixteen silver stands, were.

□1 26:1-14
□2 26:15-30
□3 26:31-37

□1 26:1

□2 26:2
□3 26:3
□4 26:4
□5 26:5
□6 26:6

□1 26:7
□2 26:8-11
□3 26:12
□4 26:13

□1 26:14

□1 26:15a

□2 26:15b; 16;
18; 20; 22; 23
□3 26:17; 19; 21

• *Crossbars*

• *Gold*

strengthened in some way^{□4} (the details are very obscure). There were also cross-bars to link all the frames together^{□5}. The frames, crossbars and the bands which held frames and crossbars together were all made of gold^{□6}

□4 26:24-25

□5 26:26-28

□6 26:29

At the same time as all of this was being told to Moses, he was also being given some kind of vision, or perhaps a model, of the tabernacle. There was a plan which was 'shown' him at the top of Mount Sinai^{□1}. He saw something as well as heard something.

□1 26:1-30

The veil

• *Separated the holy and most holy places*

Next **the veil** of the 'most holy place' is mentioned. A colourful curtain was to be made^{□1}. It would be hung inside to make a division between the holy place and the 'most holy place'^{□2}. The atonement cover and ark would be in the most holy place^{□3}. The table and lampstand would be in the holy place^{□4}, and the north and south sides. The holy of holies was to the east; the entrance to the whole site was in the west.

□1 26:31

□2 26:32-33

□3 26:34

□4 26:35

Another curtain

• *At the entrance of the tent*

Next **another curtain** is mentioned. A curtain was placed at the entrance to the tent^{□1}, at the entrance also would be five posts of acacia wood, covered with gold, and set in bronze stands^{□2}. We must not over-interpret all the finer details of this description. It is the main overall structure that is significant, rather than the tiny details. We shall have further opportunity to consider its meaning in later chapters of Exodus^{□3} but some preliminary impressions are clear already.

□1 26:36

□2 26:37

□3 Exodus 35-40

Preliminary impressions

• *A sure and certain way to approach God*

1. As God took steps to see that the tabernacle structure was well protected and secure, so we may rest in the confidence that God has a sure and certain way for us to approach Him through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2. *The outside view plain and unattractive but the inside view beautiful*

2. As the tabernacle was humble and unostentatious from the outside but colourful when viewed from the inside, so the gospel way of salvation is unostentatious. The world has always despised a carpenter-Saviour whose offer of salvation consists in His having been crucified. The world has always been shocked by the idea of salvation by blood-atonement. Yet that which is despised when viewed from outside is seen to be beautiful when viewed from within. Jesus who 'tabernacled' among us (as we may translate John 1:14) was not recognized as having any beauty that we should desire Him, yet He too is glorious in His inner being. The world saw nothing worthwhile in Him; but we have seen His glory.



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