

Curtains and coverings

Now we are told how the main structure of the tabernacle was prepared. There were the curtains and covering (36:8–19 records the fulfilling of the instructions given in 26:1–14). Then there were the wooden boards (36:20–34 records the fulfilling of the instructions of 26:15–30). Then 36:35–38 records the fulfilling of 26:31–37. The purpose of these chapters^{□1} is to emphasise that everything that God commanded was actually done. The main repetitions are as follows:

□1 35:4-39:31

• *The purpose of these chapters is to emphasise that everything that God commanded was actually done*

The materials	35:4–9 (see also 25:1–9)
The workers	35:30–36:1 (see also 31:1–11)
The coverings	36:8–19 (see also 26:1–14)
The wooden frame	36:20–34 (see also 26:15–29)
The veil and the screen	36:35–38 (see also 26:31–37)
The ark	37:1–9 (see also 25:10–22)
The table	37:10–16 (see also 25:23–30)
The lampstand	37:17–24 (see also 25:31–40)
The altar of incense	37:25–28 (see also 30:1–10)
The altar	38:1–7 (see also 27:1–8)
The laver	38:8 (see also 30:17–21)
The courtyard	38:9–20 (see also 27:9–19)
The ephod	39:2–7 (see also 28:6–14)
The breastplate	39:8–21 (see also 28:15–30)
The robe	39:22–26 (see also 28:31–35)
The plate, turban, coat and sash	39:27–31 (see also 28:36–40)

Four coverings were placed over a framework. The two inner ones are called curtains; the two outer ones are called coverings.

(i) *The innermost curtains were curtains of linen*

(i) **The innermost curtains were curtains of linen**^{□1}. There were ten of them. 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 joined together, five at a time, so as to make two large curtains. The two large rectangular covers were laid over the entire tabernacle with its two rooms.

□1 36:8-13

(ii) *The second layer consisted of curtains of goat-hair*

(ii) **The second layer consisted of curtains of goat-hair**^{□1}. This material was evidently finely spun. It would have been fairly soft, luxurious, yet strong material.

□1 36:14-18

(iii) *Next was a heavier covering*

(iii) **Next was a heavier covering**^{□1}. Over the various inner curtains were put two kinds of coverings. One was of tanned rams' skins (as the RSV has it). There is a difference between what was made of goats' hair, and what was made of goats' skins. The latter was heavier and stronger.

□1 36:19a

(iv) *The outermost covering was made of the skins of some clean animal*

(iv) **The outermost covering**^{□1} **was made of the skins of some clean animal**. Which animal is involved is not certain. The RSV says 'goatskins'. It was obviously not very beautiful. When you looked at the tabernacle, let us say from the doorway of the courtyard, you saw simply a brown goatskin-coloured tent. There was nothing specially attractive about it. Its rich treasures were entirely on the inside. Nothing specially attractive or colourful was visible on the outside.

□1 36:19b

• *Nothing especially attractive from the outside*

The wooden boards

Next comes **the wooden boards** (36:20–34 records the fulfilling of the instructions of 26:15–30). Moses was told about this before the incident of the golden calf. The 'walls' of the tent consisted only of the fabrics. But

there was an acacia-wood frame over which the curtains were placed. There was enough of them to go right around the building. 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. There were also crossbars to link all the frames together. The frames, crossbars and the bands which held the frames and crossbars together were all made of

• *God's instructions implemented*

gold. Instructions about all of this had been given to Moses; now we are told of its implementation.

Veil, pillars and screen

• Beautiful when viewed from within but humble from outside

• So is the gospel

Next in 36:35–38, **the veil, the pillars, the screen**, were placed at the doorway of the tent, with their various fittings.

We have seen before that the building was well-protected and secure. 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. God took steps to see that the tabernacle structure was well-protected and secure. Similarly 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. As the tabernacle was humble and unostentatious so the gospel way of salvation is unostentatious from the outside but beautiful to those who see it from within. That which is despised when viewed from outside is seen to be beautiful when viewed from within.

A humble dwelling place

• God is patient, often content to wait for glory

The tabernacle was a humble dwelling place. Shepherds and pilgrims were the kind of people who lived in tents. Eminent and rich people like palaces and mansions. What does God like to dwell in? A tent. We remember how He said to David, ‘Did I ever say... “Why did you not build me a house ...?”’¹. The wicked kings of Jeremiah 22 lived in palaces with fine cedar beams². God lived in a tent with walls of linen and animal skins. God is the one who more than any being in this world is entitled to show pride and majesty; yet often He is patient, content to wait for glory, quite happy to dwell in a tent.

1 2 Samuel 7:7
2 Jeremiah 22:1, 4, 7

A movable dwelling place

• Temporary and ready for conflict

The tabernacle was a movable dwelling place. It made it possible for the glory of God to move through the wilderness as the people of God travelled towards the land of Canaan. Just as shepherds lived in tents, so did soldiers. God’s kingdom is in a very transitory and movable condition. The kingdom of God in heaven is like a temple. The kingdom of God on earth is like a tent, mobile, fragile, temporary, ready for battle and conflict.

A protective shelter

• It all pictured the coming of the gospel

The tabernacle was a protective shelter. It gave protection and covering for the sacred furniture which symbolised fellowship with God.

It all pictured the coming of the gospel. The people of Israel did not go inside it; they gathered at its door. The gospel had not yet come in fullness, but this symbolic building shadowed and sketched what God would do in coming amongst His people through the sacrificial death of His Son.



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