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## THE TABERNACLE TENT

*Exodus 26:1-30*

In our studies in Exodus, we have been looking at some of the items in the Tabernacle, and we have now come to the construction of the tabernacle itself which also looks to Jesus, and the structure starts in v1-7: “Moreover you shall make the tabernacle *with* ten curtains *of* fine woven linen and blue, purple, and scarlet *thread*; with artistic designs of cherubim you shall weave them. <sup>2</sup>The length of each curtain *shall be* twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits. And every one of the curtains shall have the same measurements. <sup>3</sup>Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and *the other* five curtains *shall be* coupled to one another. <sup>4</sup>And you shall make loops of blue *yarn* on the edge of the curtain on the selvedge of *one* set, and likewise you shall do on the outer edge of *the other* curtain of the second set. <sup>5</sup>Fifty loops you shall make in the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that *is* on the end of the second set, that the loops may be clasped to one another. <sup>6</sup>And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains together with the clasps, so that it may be one tabernacle.” In simple terms, the Tabernacle was a tent with a frame and a series of elaborate coverings. This section describes the first covering, the one seen from the interior of the tabernacle.

It would be very easy to pass over this and see it merely as a description of how it was to be made, see it as mildly interesting and then move on to something else. However, that would be missing so much of what God has imprinted in the way it was to be built. It is important to remember that the Tabernacle was given to Moses as a shadow of the true Tabernacle in heaven, so it does all point to something greater, as we learn from the book of Hebrews. The whole structure points to Jesus, giving clues of the gospel. First, the instruction was that it was to be made of 10 curtains, and 10 is the number of numerical completeness, because after that you add the digits 1, 2, 3 etc to the number 10. It is also the number of human responsibility, as pictured in the 10 Commandments, 10 plagues on Egypt, both situations demanding a response to God’s requirements from those involved. Jesus is, of course, the only man who has truly kept the Law and the commandments of God.

In v1 we read that the curtains were to be made of fine woven linen, with blue, purple and scarlet thread. Fine linen in Scripture is always a symbol of righteousness, and although this passage does not specifically say that the linen was white, by implication it must have been to underline the theme of righteousness for the fine linen. It is interesting that we have 4 colours named here, and we have 4 gospels describing the life

of Jesus. Luke's emphasis was the humanity of Jesus for he gives us the genealogy of Jesus from Adam, but needless to say, Jesus' humanity is entirely righteous, which would correlate with the fine linen here. What is glorious for us is that it is not only Jesus who is righteous, but because of what He has done for us on the cross, we are made righteous in God's sight. We have no righteousness in ourselves, for it is all in and through Jesus. In Revelation 19:7-8 we read: "7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." What a glorious day of completion that will be for us, and how amazing that our fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints! That would, no doubt, refer to deeds done under the direction of the Holy Spirit and not in the flesh, but what an incentive for us to live Spirit-filled lives for Christ!

Then we have the coloured threads, and blue speaks of deity, which is the major thrust of John's gospel. Blue is the colour of heaven, and Jesus our Saviour came down from heaven as God as well as man. Purple is the colour of royalty and kingship, pointing to Jesus the King of kings. This links with the gospel of Matthew, whose focus is on Jesus as the Son of David, the legitimate King of Israel. Purple is a colour that is a blend of blue and red, so we have the mix of blue as deity and red as humanity in Christ.

Scarlet points to the blood of sacrifice, initially of the animals in the Tabernacle but ultimately to Jesus who died in our place for our sins. That links with Mark's gospel, and his focus is on Jesus as the Son of Man and servant. The Hebrew word used for scarlet here can also mean worm, and is used prophetically as such in Psalm 22:6, looking forward to Jesus, "But I *am* a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people." It was this type of worm that was crushed to obtain red dye, just as Jesus was crushed for our sins. The Hebrew word for this worm is *tolaa*, but in Psalm 22: it has a further T at the end, and the Hebrew T sometimes used to be written as a cross similar to Jesus' cross. The underlying meaning is that the prophecy speaks of Jesus was a sacrificial worm fixed to a cross.

This worm is born with legs, but over time the female loses the use of its legs, which is why it is referred to as a worm. In addition, when this worm reproduced, it would fasten itself to the limb of a tree (never to leave it again), where it would draw its sustenance from the sap of the tree, not unlike how as believers in the True Vine that is Jesus draw on the sap of the Holy Spirit to bear fruit. Then as the eggs hatched, the worm would cover the larvae with its body. The larvae would begin to feed on the body of the worm that had given them life, thus it would die for the young that it had given birth to. As it died, it left a red spot of blood on the limb of the tree. After the worm fell, the spot of blood on the tree would dry after 3 days, becoming a white, flaky substance that would fall to the ground like snow. This worm had to die before its blood could be used by mankind. What a lovely picture of Jesus, who died fixed to a wooden cross and wouldn't move until the work was finished enabling us to be born again, then rose again after 3 days and in the process took our sins which are as scarlet, so we are washed white as snow. We eat of His body and drink of his blood spiritually when we take Communion, as the newly hatched worms ate of their mother's body. This concept is picked up by Isaiah in 1:18: "'Come now, and let us reason together,'" says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The word for crimson there is the same word that is used in Exodus. It is awesome that God's word is so specific that it was this worm used in scarlet colouring in the Tabernacle, speaking so vividly of Jesus and His sacrifice for us.

The curtains were to have artistic designs of cherubim, reminding the people that they were in the presence of God, for the cherubim are in God's presence. Psalm 80:1 tells us: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock; You who dwell *between* the cherubim, shine forth!" Isaiah 37:16 also describes God as dwelling between the cherubim, and obviously on the mercy seat that we saw a couple of studies back, there are two cherubim with God dwelling between them. The Tabernacle was to be the place where God met with His people Israel, all pointing to Jesus in and through whom reconciliation is made between God and man.

The curtains were arranged in two groups of five, to be joined together by 50 clasps of gold and 50 blue loops. Being two groups of five, it reminds us that God gave the 10 commandments on two tablets of stone. As we have seen, blue is the colour of heaven, and Jesus is the God/man who came from heaven. The gold clasps remind us of deity, for Jesus is Divine as well as human. The number 50 is not without significance, for 50 occurs elsewhere in the Bible. Every 50 years Israel was to have a Jubilee year, when slaves were set free and debts cancelled. There were 50 days from the Feast of Firstfruits until the Feast of Pentecost. The concept is therefore of freedom, liberty, debts cancelled, and Jesus has achieved this on our behalf before God the Father, for He paid the debt of sin on our behalf before God. Noah's ark was 50 cubits wide, and was a place of safety and salvation, being a picture of Christ also, so we have a salvation aspect to the number 50. Apparently, there are 50 names and titles of Christ which reveal His deity, but I haven't (yet) sought them out.

We now move to consider the outer covering of the Tabernacle in v7-13: <sup>7</sup> "You shall also make curtains of goats' hair, to be a tent over the tabernacle. You shall make eleven curtains. <sup>8</sup> The length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; and the eleven curtains shall all have the same measurements. <sup>9</sup> And you shall couple five curtains by themselves and six curtains by themselves, and you shall double over the sixth curtain at the forefront of the tent. <sup>10</sup> You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in *one* set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain of the second set. <sup>11</sup> And you shall make fifty bronze clasps, put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together, that it may be one. <sup>12</sup> The remnant that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. <sup>13</sup> And a cubit on one side and a cubit on the other side, of what remains of the length of the curtains of the tent, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and on that side, to cover it."

These curtains of goats' hair would probably be black, being the colour of most middle eastern goats. It was a coarse material often used for making tents. There are various times in the Bible when the Tabernacle is referred to as a tent, and it was this goats' hair covering that formed the basis of that tent. Whereas the linen inner curtains had 10 sections, the goats' hair curtains had 11, with the 11<sup>th</sup> being folded back, so the linen was covered except where this folding back occurred. This in itself gives us a picture of Jesus' life, for if you divide His life into periods of 3 years, then for 10 of those He lived in virtual obscurity, but for the 11<sup>th</sup> His life was 'folded back' so that He was open to the public. As the linen, speaking of righteousness was only visible when the 11<sup>th</sup> curtain was folded back, so the righteousness of Jesus was visible during His time of public ministry. The numbers are relevant too, for there were two sections, one of 5 curtains and one of 6. Six is the number of man and 5 the number of grace, and it was at the Tabernacle that God's grace met with sinful man. However, it is only in Jesus that God's grace meets sinful man such that our sins are finally dealt with and removed, for under the Mosaic Covenant with the animal sacrifices the sins were only covered. Hebrews 10:4 tells us: "For *it is* not possible that the blood of

bulls and goats could take away sins.” So, we have a total of 11 curtains, that number being one short of the 12 that indicates governmental perfection. Thus the 11 curtains also speak of lawlessness or disorder, for man can never truly keep God’s law, which is why Jesus had to fulfil it for us. The theme of lawlessness is also picked up in the fact that the curtains are made of goats’ hair, for we know that Jesus will separate people at His return as between sheep and goats, and it will be the goats who are the ones who will be consigned to eternal destruction.

For the curtains of goats’ hair, the fastenings were of bronze (or brass in some translations), rather than the gold of the inner curtains. Bronze or brass is the metal of judgement in the Bible, and we are all under God’s judgement until we are cleansed by Him – for Israel they had to sacrifice an animal in the Tabernacle, but that only pointed to Jesus who was the promised Messiah to come. We have the benefit of knowing that Jesus is the fulfilment of the needed sacrifice for our sins. We see the bronze/brass concept of judgement in scriptures such as Numbers 21:8-9, when Israel was afflicted by a plague of serpents: <sup>8</sup>Then the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” <sup>9</sup>So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.” When Samson was finally captured by the Philistines, they bound him with bronze fetters, Judges 16:21: <sup>21</sup>Then the Philistines took him and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza. They bound him with bronze fetters, and he became a grinder in the prison.” So, returning to Exodus, it was at the Tabernacle that God averted His judgement of sinful man at the mercy seat, pointing as always to Jesus.

The length of each curtain was to be 30 cubits (about 45’), with 30 being the number of consecration to the priesthood. Each priest in Israel was to be 30 years old when he started his ministry, just as Jesus was that age when He started His ministry. The black curtains of goat skins covered the beauty of the embroidered tapestry on the fine linen, a picture of how Jesus who was righteous and beautiful bore the blackness of our sin on the cross.

In v14 we see that there was a further covering for the Tabernacle: <sup>14</sup>“You shall also make a covering of ram skins dyed red for the tent, and a covering of badger skins above that.” This verse tells us that there were two further coverings for the Tabernacle – rams’ skins and badger skins. Rams were used in several of the OT offerings that took place within the Tabernacle, including the consecration of priests. The first mention of a ram in the Bible was in Genesis 15, when God reiterated His covenant with Abraham that he would inherit the Promised Land and a ram was part of the sacrifice to seal that. The second reference is in Genesis 22, when God provided the ram for the sacrifice instead of Isaac, a beautiful picture of Jesus being offered as God’s only begotten Son, in place of Abraham’s son of promise. The ram therefore speaks of sacrifice, substitution and consecration underpinned by God’s faithfulness, all of which we see in Jesus on our behalf. The skins, which would have had the wool removed, were to be dyed red, clearly pointing to the blood of sacrifice, and were the central covering to the Tabernacle, just as Jesus is often seen as the central member of the Trinity, and is certainly central to our salvation. When Jesus came the first time, He gave His own blood for our salvation; when He returns His garments will be stained with the blood of His enemies, for He is victorious.

The final covering was that of badger skins, although some translations suggest these might have been seal or porpoise skins. Personally, I think badger is more likely, particularly as there would be very few seals and porpoises in the wilderness, whereas in the Middle East badger skins were common and often thought to

be ugly. These gave a durable and water-resistant outer covering. There was no outer beauty to the badger skins, just as Isaiah 53: 2 tells us prophetically about Jesus: “For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, *there is no beauty that we should desire Him.*” These skins formed the outer covering, symbolising the protection and covering that Jesus gives to His people, as He protects us in the storms of life. The various coverings also concealed the various furnishings from the view of the outsider. Given that the furnishings of the Tabernacle all gave precious insights into the coming Messiah, it reminds us that the outsider will often not appreciate the rich truths of the Bible and will frequently mock them. The unbelievers need the gospel, but it is unwise to give them the deeper truths of the word as they will not be understood.

We turn to the structure of the Tabernacle in v15-25: “<sup>15</sup> “And for the tabernacle you shall make the boards of acacia wood, standing upright. <sup>16</sup> Ten cubits *shall be* the length of a board, and a cubit and a half *shall be* the width of each board. <sup>17</sup> Two tenons *shall be* in each board for binding one to another. Thus you shall make for all the boards of the tabernacle. <sup>18</sup> And you shall make the boards for the tabernacle, twenty boards for the south side. <sup>19</sup> You shall make forty sockets of silver under the twenty boards: two sockets under each of the boards for its two tenons. <sup>20</sup> And for the second side of the tabernacle, the north side, *there shall be* twenty boards <sup>21</sup> and their forty sockets of silver: two sockets under each of the boards. <sup>22</sup> For the far side of the tabernacle, westward, you shall make six boards. <sup>23</sup> And you shall also make two boards for the two back corners of the tabernacle. <sup>24</sup> They shall be coupled together at the bottom and they shall be coupled together at the top by one ring. Thus it shall be for both of them. They shall be for the two corners. <sup>25</sup> So there shall be eight boards with their sockets of silver—sixteen sockets—two sockets under each of the boards.”

As before, acacia wood is used for the boards, and this is hardwearing wood, sometimes thought to be incorruptible. We have seen before that wood speaks of humanity, so Jesus was incorruptible in his humanity; His manhood was untainted by sin. Even in His death, the Father did not allow Jesus to see corruption in the grave (Psalm 16:10), for death could not hold Jesus. That could not have been the case if there had been any hint of sin in Jesus. There were 48 boards and they were to be overlaid with gold, although we don't see that until v29. We have the pattern that we have seen before of humanity overlaid with deity, seen perfectly in Jesus. Each board was placed in silver sockets, and silver is the metal of redemption in the Bible, so the whole framework looks to this being the place of redemption, initially pictured in the sacrifices, but ultimately looking forward to Jesus. It is important to remember that these are pictorial figures, for we are not redeemed by corruptible things such as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:18-21). The boards gave a surround to the north, south and west elevations, leaving the east side open. This reminds us that when Jesus returns, He will enter Jerusalem through the Eastern Gate, so not only does the Tabernacle look to Jesus first coming and His death on the cross, but to His second coming too.

The boards needed bars for fixing, as seen in v26-30: “<sup>26</sup> “And you shall make bars of acacia wood: five for the boards on one side of the tabernacle, <sup>27</sup> five bars for the boards on the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the boards of the side of the tabernacle, for the far side westward. <sup>28</sup> The middle bar shall pass through the midst of the boards from end to end. <sup>29</sup> You shall overlay the boards with gold, make their rings of gold *as* holders for the bars, and overlay the bars with gold. <sup>30</sup> And you shall raise up the tabernacle according to its pattern which you were shown on the mountain.” The bars gave stability to the structure so that it held together, again of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Jesus' humanity and deity are needed to

hold His people together and to them stability, and of course as believers we need to be joined to a church so that we are not alone, otherwise we are vulnerable to attack from the enemy. There should be no lone rangers in the church. Some have linked these 5 bars holding the framework together to the 5 ministries in Ephesians 4 of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. These giftings support and strengthen the church.

The bars were held in place by rings of gold, and rings speak of love, eternity, having no beginning or end. The love of God for His people is unending and unchanging, and is the unifying factor in the church. All of these component parts of the Tabernacle combine to make one structure, and it all points to Jesus, through whom we are united into one spiritual building, Jew and gentile together. It is all reflected by the wood and gold of Jesus who is both human and divine, linked to the silver of his redemption for us. We are so blessed to live this side of the cross, looking for His near return, for we can see the beauty of the spiritual message in the way that the Tabernacle was constructed. It must surely reinforce our commitment to the divine inspiration and sufficiency of the Bible, and the beauty of God's plan for this world. The beauty of the Bible could not be made up by man and it truly is our handbook for life – and eternity. In addition, we should be committed to living for God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, for we are His people whose delight should be in Him.