

- e. After instructing Moses concerning the furnishings of the tabernacle, the Lord turned His attention to its *structural* features (26:1-37). He began with the coverings for the tabernacle, moving outward as He had done with its furniture.

- 1) Over the acacia wood superstructure, the tabernacle was to have a ***covering of fine linen*** brought from Egypt. That covering was to consist of ten curtain panels joined together by a series of loops and gold clasps. These white linen panels were to have figures of cherubim woven into them using blue, purple, and scarlet yarn. These figures would have been located on the linen panels so as to be visible overhead when the panels were assembled and draped over the gold covered superstructure.

Cherubim are the angelic entities closest to God, ministering directly to Him as they stand in His presence. Thus cherubim guarded the entrance to Eden (Genesis 3:24), and were represented on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies. Later prophetic visions of Yahweh would also include His ministering cherubim who are shown symbolically supporting His throne and serving His transport (cf. Ezekiel 10:1-20 with 1:4-28, 9:3 and Psalm 18:9-10). Thus this imagery on the linens emphasized that the tabernacle represented Yahweh's earthly dwelling place, even as the ark of the covenant was the footstool of His throne (2 Samuel 6:1-2; Psalm 80:1).

- 2) ***Curtains made of goats' hair*** formed the second covering. It was to be spread over the linen covering in such a way that no part of it would be visible. Thus it consisted of eleven panels, each of which was two cubits longer than the panels of the linen covering. It, too, was to have its curtains conjoined by loops and clasps, but being farther removed from God's presence, its clasps were bronze rather than gold.
- 3) Two more coverings were then to be applied over the tent: the first consisting of ***rams' skins*** sewed together and dyed red, and the outermost covering made of ***seal skins*** (NAS – *porpoise* skins) (26:14). These coverings were likely peaked at the center and provided a weather barrier.

Thus the tabernacle was clothed with four layers, each one increasingly *common* – thicker, coarser and heavier – as the layers moved outward, and each increasingly impervious to the environmental factors of sun, wind, and rain.

- 4) Supporting these layers of material was a ***three-sided wooden superstructure*** consisting of forty-eight acacia boards fifteen feet long and slightly more than two feet wide (26:15-29). Each board was to be entirely overlaid with gold and constructed with two tenons at the bottom. The three walls of the tabernacle would be constructed by setting the boards edge-to-edge and dropping their tenons into silver sockets that served as support bases. The two sides consisted of twenty boards each; the rear wall employed six boards with two others joining the two corners.

After being set into their supporting sockets and joined at the corners, the walls were then stabilized using a series of gold-covered acacia wood bars passing through gold rings on the boards.

- 5) The boards formed a three-sided rectangular structure, but that space was to include two sanctuaries: the outer sanctuary or Holy Place, and the inner cubic sanctuary known as the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was at the rear, and was to be separated from the outer room by a *veil* suspended on four gold-overlaid acacia pillars (26:31-33). Like the tabernacle's inner covering, this veil was to be an exquisite work of skilled craftsmanship, fabricated of fine twisted linen woven with blue, purple and scarlet thread and embroidered with cherubim. The inner veil divided the rectangular tabernacle into two rooms, and this division served a couple of important revelatory functions:
 - First, it contributed to the tabernacle's overall *staged* structure. Beginning with the entrance into the courtyard on the east, movement into and through the tabernacle was a matter of progressive stages, each of which expressed an increasing glory conveyed by the articles present, the materials used, the imagery employed, and the function performed. This intricate staging scheme insured that Israel would have a profound sense of its **approach** to God and what that approach entailed.
 - But as the two rooms of the tabernacle communicated the idea of progressive nearness to God, so they also expressed the principles of **distance** and **separation**. The Sinai Covenant fulfilled Yahweh's promise to Abraham to be the God of his descendents; He had been present with the patriarchs, and He would dwell in the midst of Israel. But He would do so inside of a closed sanctuary behind a veil of separation. Israel's privilege and glory was that their God was enthroned among them above the wings of the cherubim, but access to His throne room was forbidden to them.
- 6) Yahweh had appointed a ritual and symbolic pathway into His presence, but every step along that path brought increased restrictions of time, place, and person. The Lord resided symbolically in the Holy of Holies in the form of His Shekinah, but in that dwelling place He was separated from and inaccessible to even His ordained priests as they went about their appointed duties of worship and service on the other side of the veil. At the east end of the outer sanctuary was a second veil leading out into a *courtyard* that surrounded the tabernacle (27:9-19). This courtyard, in turn, had its own entrance, also on the east side. The sons of Israel could enter from the camp into the courtyard of the sanctuary, but only the priests could enter the sanctuary itself. The inner veil separated the priests from Yahweh; the outer veil separated the people from Him.

- 7) Two sacred furnishings were located in the courtyard: the priests' *laver* (30:17-21) and the *altar of burnt offering* (27:1-8). Like the clasps that conjoined the panels of the goats' hair curtain, their lesser holiness – by virtue of their greater distance from Yahweh's presence and their visibility to Israel – was expressed by their being made of bronze rather than gold.

The bronze altar was the first object encountered when passing through the entrance into the courtyard. It was the site of Israel's burnt offerings, which were sacrificed by the priests every morning and evening in addition to offerings brought for personal offenses and special occasions.

The laver was positioned between the bronze altar and the veil into the tabernacle. It was used by the priests for ritual washing before entering the Holy Place to perform their daily duties in burning incense and maintaining the lampstand (ref. 40:30-32). Its relative commonness among the various objects associated with the tabernacle is evident not only in its bronze construction, but also by the conspicuous lack of definition God provided regarding it. Unlike the furnishings of the sanctuary – whose features and form were prescribed in minute detail, Yahweh's instruction regarding the laver was simply that it be made of bronze. It wasn't a part of the sanctuary or its sacred rites, but only provided for the priests' ritual cleansing in preparation for their appointed service and worship.

The fact that God exhaustively and minutely prescribed the tabernacle's structure, furnishings, and arrangement has led many to feel the need to try to assign symbolic meaning to every aspect of it. The reasoning is that God wouldn't have bothered to provide such intricate and exhaustive definition if all of the details weren't individually significant. This conviction has led to all sorts of speculation regarding the meaning of the tabernacle's various features, dimensions, numbers, materials, shapes, colors, etc. But while the symbolism associated with many things is clearly evident or demonstrable from the breadth of biblical revelation, attempting to assign meaning to all of the details of the tabernacle and its arrangement is irresponsible; there is simply no way to make those assignments without entering into the realm of speculation.

But if the communication of manifold layers of symbolic meaning wasn't God's reason for prescribing every detail of His sanctuary, what was the reason? The answer begins with recognizing that the tabernacle as a whole was symbolic. Yahweh's intention wasn't that the sons of Israel would find meaning in the *specifics* of the minutiae as such, but in the *fact* of the minutiae: The Lord prescribed every aspect of the tabernacle in order to emphasize that this earthly sanctuary represented a greater entity that lay behind it. God left no detail of the tabernacle undefined precisely because it was to be understood as a physical replica of an ultimate spiritual counterpart (cf. 25:9, 40 with Hebrews 8:5).

The point of God's exacting definition was to emphasize the typological nature of the sanctuary: *The earthly tabernacle reflected and expressed in tangible form God's intention for sacred space and its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ.*

- f. Yahweh's covenant with Israel defined and established the Father-son relationship that was to exist between them, and the tabernacle provided the primary tangible expression of their intimacy by symbolizing God's abiding presence with His people. This intimacy was further expressed by the way God *ordered the camp of Israel* in relation to the tabernacle. This prescription is provided in the book of Numbers (2:1-34, 3:38).

The tabernacle and its courtyard were configured as a rectangular space that was to stand in the center of the Israelite encampment with three of Israel's tribes camped on each side. In that way it emphasized to the people God's immediate presence among them and His centrality to their national, covenant life. It provided them with a constant reminder of the meaning of the covenant and their status as Abraham's descendants: Yahweh had bound Himself by covenant to be the God, Father, and Lord-Protector of Israel.

The east side of the tabernacle was the most significant, evidenced by the eastern location of all three of its veils. Entrance into the courtyard came from the east, and for that reason Moses, Aaron, and the priests camped on the east side of the tabernacle immediately outside the courtyard curtain (Numbers 3:38). Beyond them to the east camped Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar. Among the three, Judah was preeminent, being the first of the twelve tribes to set out after the ark, and the tribe under whose standard Zebulun and Issachar were reckoned (Numbers 2:1-9).

Judah enjoyed unique status among the tribes of Israel by virtue of its regal appointment and destiny. Judah would be the progenitor of David through whom would come Yahweh's Messiah. This One was the son specified in the Davidic Covenant, making Him the focal point of Israel's hope regarding the promised kingdom (cf. 2 Samuel 7:1ff; Psalm 89; Isaiah 9:1-7, 11:1-16, 55:1-5; Jeremiah 23:1-6, 33:14-26; Ezekiel 34:1-31, 37:15-28; Hosea 3:1-5; Amos 9:11-15).

The tribal intimacy of Zebulun and Issachar with Judah testified prophetically of Galilee as the place of Jesus' upbringing and the center of His public ministry. These two tribes, along with Naphtali, would be given the land inheritance surrounding the Sea of Galilee, and the Lord's prophet would later reveal that upon this region the glory of God would first arise (Isaiah 9:1-7). *That these Israelite tribes would be the first to see the sun rise in the east anticipated their privilege in being the first to behold the true Sunrise from on high* – the One in whom the fullness of God's mercy would visit those sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death (ref. Luke 1:67-79; cf. Matthew 4:12-17; Zechariah 14:1-4).

- g. As Yahweh had prescribed His sanctuary, so He appointed the men to construct it (31:1-11). These were skilled artisans, but most importantly, they were men filled with His Spirit. The Spirit had been the creative power behind God's first dwelling in Eden (Genesis 1:1-2), and so He would be with God's true sanctuary (cf. Zechariah 4:1-10 with Luke 1:26-35; John 1:1-34, 2:13-21, 4:19-26) and the consummate temple constructed upon Him (Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:10ff).