
Heaven Touching Earth

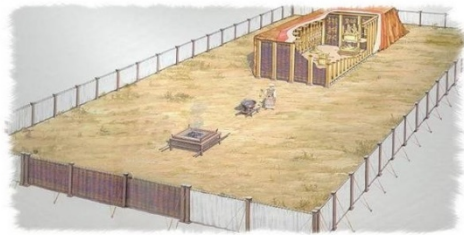
The Tabernacle's Construction and Courtyard

Exodus 26-27

Introduction The last time Esther and I drove out to visit her family in Washington State, we thought we would tent as we went. <Researching, selecting, purchasing and then the trouble with weather>

Israel is building a portable worship center, a tent in the wilderness...

Sometimes understanding the Bible takes patience. It comes to us in ways that might just put us off from doing the hard work to get it right. But once we do that, we can understand it and see its significance throughout all the Scriptures.



In the Tent of the Sanctuary

Exodus 26

The tabernacle was to be a tent. It was constructed with the best of materials available and useful for a tent that would be put up and taken down nearly every day until the kingdom was established. Then it would be erected in the capital city of Jerusalem and remain there until it was replaced by Solomon's Temple.

The Fabric Lining the Tent

(v.1-6)

"Moreover, you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them. ² The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall be the same size. ³ Five curtains shall be coupled to one another, and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another. ⁴ And you shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set. Likewise you shall make loops on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set. ⁵ Fifty loops you shall make on the one curtain, and fifty loops you shall make on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite one another. ⁶ And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be a single whole.

These first instructions were to fabricate a blue, purple and scarlet colored lining for the interior of the tent. This is what you would have seen from the inside.

They were to make ten sheets of finely woven linen which would have been off white or ivory. They were to be decorated in multi-colored hued yarn and embroidered with images of cherubim. Each was to be around 42 feet long and 6 feet wide. These were sewn together into sets of five to make two enormous sheets. These two sheets were then joined by fifty loops interlocked by fifty golden clasps. The resulting inner lining was 60 feet by 42 feet. It would be draped over the Tabernacle frame which we will discuss in a few minutes. It would be around 18 inches off the ground.

The Skins Covering the Tent

(v.7-14)

Two layers of different kinds of skins made up the middle and outer walls.

⁷ "You shall also make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; eleven curtains shall you make. ⁸ The length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits. The eleven curtains shall be the same size. ⁹ You shall couple five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves, and the sixth curtain you shall double over at the front of the tent. ¹⁰ 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 that is outermost in the second set.

¹¹ "You shall make fifty clasps of bronze, and put the clasps into the loops, and couple the tent together that it may be a single whole. ¹² And the part that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. ¹³ And the extra that remains in the length of the curtains, the cubit on the one side, and the cubit on the other side, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and that side, to cover it. ¹⁴ And you shall make for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins and a covering of goatskins on top.

The middle layer was made up of eleven sheets woven from fine goat's hair. While Cashmere is from a particular kind of goat, this would have been similar. It is larger than the inner linen covering as its 45 feet long and 6 feet wide. They were also sewn together, five to make set and six to make the second. When they were hung over the frame, the extra one was to hang over the entry, like a gable or a porch. The extra length ensured that this covering reached all the way to the ground (contrary to many common drawings). They were also to be held together by a system of loops and gold clasps.

Over the goat skin layer, another layer was made of tanned ram skins. Over that was the top layer of fine goatskin leather. There is some discussion among the scholars that the word here could refer to ox-hide. Either way, the outer layer acted as a rain-fly to prevent rain from entering the Tabernacle. While no specific dimensions are given for the last two layers, it is safe to assume that they were made the same way and were of the same size as the goat hair layer. Thus, they also could reach the ground to be staked down.

The Framework Upholding the Tent

(v.15-30)

¹⁵ "You shall make upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood. ¹⁶ Ten cubits shall be the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the breadth of each frame. ¹⁷ There shall be two tenons in each frame, for fitting together. So shall you do for all the frames of the tabernacle. ¹⁸ You shall make the frames for the tabernacle: twenty frames for the south side; ¹⁹ and forty bases of silver you shall make under the twenty frames, two bases under one frame for its two tenons, and two bases under the next frame for its two tenons; ²⁰ and for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side twenty frames, ²¹ and their forty bases of silver, two bases under one frame, and two bases under the next frame. ²² And for the rear of the tabernacle

westward you shall make six frames. ²³ And you shall make two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear; ²⁴ they shall be separate beneath, but joined at the top, at the first ring. Thus shall it be with both of them; they shall form the two corners. ²⁵ And there shall be eight frames, with their bases of silver, sixteen bases; two bases under one frame, and two bases under another frame.

²⁶ "You shall make bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, ²⁷ and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the side of the tabernacle at the rear westward. ²⁸ The middle bar, halfway up the frames, shall run from end to end. ²⁹ You shall overlay the frames with gold and shall make their rings of gold for holders for the bars, and you shall overlay the bars with gold. ³⁰ Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain.

The instructions here are a complex framing of interlocking, acacia wood units overlaid with gold and set in gold bases. Each frame set were to be 15 feet high and 27 inches wide. They were to be overlaid with gold. Each frame was to have two pegs under its base which would fit into the gold bases. They were to have five horizontal sets of rings all set at the same height. While older commentaries and drawings picture these as boards, it is more likely that they were framing over which the curtains were draped. There were twenty sets of frames down each side with additional set in each corner to reinforce the corner and square the structure. The corner units were held together at the bottom by the bases and at the top by a single ring. There were six frame sets for the back or west wall.

They were to make 80 silver bases for the sides and 8 for the back frames. These bases had a hole in the center of each of them to receive the peg on the bottom of the frame. Therefore, regardless of the surface, whether, rock, grass or sand, the tabernacle could be erected and stand firm.

Verse 26 refers to bars (or in some translations, cross-bars). The question here is whether these were crossbars like ceiling beams to support the curtains draped across it. If so, then the description here would be of a A-frame type structure which might shed rain better. However, the sizes of the curtains make the footprint or floor space of the tent much smaller or they don't go all the way to the ground. One other suggestion is that the outer most skin, the one acting as a rain-fly was the only one over the high center bar and since its dimensions were not actually given, it was sized larger in order to cover the whole structure. Thus, from the inside the rooms would have a flat ceiling but from the outside the tabernacle would just look like a large, A-shaped tent.

What is more likely is that the bars here run the length of the structure (front to back/East to West). They actually lock the frames together. The center bar was to be long enough to run the full length of the tabernacle while the others appear to be shorter. Model builders have pointed out that with this scheme, sections could be interlocked on the ground, raised together and then the whole king pinned with the last bar through the rings on every frame. Another reason to think this is the correct understanding is that the back wall has five poles through rings as well and is assembled in the same fashion as the long side walls.

So the framework has been designed and detailed. Once this was completed it was to be assembled and erected as Moses was shown on the mountain. The tabernacle was setup with longwise east and west with open end facing east and the

closed end facing west. Then, the layers of the curtains were to be draped over the frame beginning with the inner most and working toward the outermost.

The Veil dividing the Rooms

(v.31-35)

The next set of instructions are about the veil that divided the interior of the Tabernacle into two rooms.

³¹ "And you shall make a veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. It shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. ³² And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver. ³³ And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the ark of the testimony in there within the veil. And the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy. ³⁴ You shall put the mercy seat on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place. ³⁵ And you shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand on the south side of the tabernacle opposite the table, and you shall put the table on the north side.

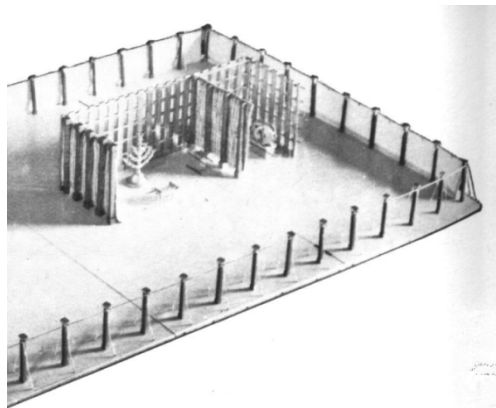
They were to make a veil that would divide the inside of the Tabernacle. This veil is made of the same material, design and embroidery as the inner lining. It would have been 15 feet high. Four gold overlaid posts of acacia wood were to be made and set in silver bases, similar to those for the frames. The veil was to be hung from these four, evenly spaced columns. Other texts indicate that the veil divided the space into an outer room that was two-thirds of the whole and an inner room one-third of the whole. The Holy of Holies, the inner room then was a perfect cube: 15 feet high, wide and deep.

The word translated "veil" here is different from that used to refer to the curtains or coverings. This word was primarily used to refer to the covering a lady would wear to conceal her face or her whole body. The massive curtain then not only divides the space but also conceals or hides what is behind it. As the Law unfolds, it also bars access. Like the fearsome and fenced mountain on which these instructions were given, God's people were to draw near but could not enter in.

Moses is instructed to place the furniture in the proper locations. The Ark of the Covenant was to be set in the center of the inner room, now designated the Holy of Holies. The lid with the cherubim, called the mercy seat or place of atonement, was to be placed on it. This was to be the sole object in the inner room.

In the outer room, designated the Holy Place, the lampstand was to be placed on the south side or on the left side as you entered the room. It stood directly on the ground and gave light to the outer room. The table of showbread was placed on the north side or the right side as you entered the room. Both pieces were to be setup in the center of the sides and directly opposite one another.

The result will look something like the illustration by Dr. D.W.Gooding.



The Curtain making a Door

(v.36-37)

³⁶ "You shall make a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework. ³⁷ And you shall make for the screen five pillars of acacia, and overlay them with gold. Their hooks shall be of gold, and you shall cast five bases of bronze for them.

The tabernacle has an entryway on the east side. It would have just been a huge, open end. Through these instructions, a curtain was made of the same design as the inner lining and hung so as to make a doorway. The curtain was of the same finely woven linen material, colored yarn and embroidered needlework so that the interior of the tabernacle was beautifully colored with embroidered cherubim all around.

The curtain was hung on five gold overlaid acacia wood columns evenly spaced across the entry. These were set in bronze stands like the ones for the frames and the inner columns. It is interesting to note that the wall bases were of gold, the veil bases were of silver and the entry bases were of bronze. The entry was protected from the weather by the extra material of the roof curtains that hung out over the top like an awning.

Through the Courtyard of the Sanctuary

(27:1-21)

The tabernacle itself sat in a courtyard whose perimeter was marked by a fence and whose main area was dominated by a large bronze altar.

The Altar for Burnt Offerings

(v.1-8)

"You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits broad. The altar shall be square, and its height shall be three cubits. ² And you shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. ³ You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and fire pans. You shall make all its utensils of bronze. ⁴ You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. ⁵ And you shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net extends halfway down the altar. ⁶ And you shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. ⁷ And the poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles are on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. ⁸ You shall make it hollow, with boards. As it has been shown you on the mountain, so shall it be made.

God commanded that a massive bronze altar be built to be placed in the courtyard of the tabernacle. It was to be huge, hollow box, 7½ feet wide, 7½ feet long and 4½ feet high. It was to be made of acacia wood planks. It was to be overlaid with bronze and horns cast into the bronze on each of the four corners. A bronze grate was to be cast with rings on its four corners. Halfway down on the inside of the altar, the grate was to be hung. Rings were to be attached to the outside through which bronze plated poles were thrust and by which it was to be carried.

This is the altar for the sacrifices, the burnt offerings for sin. This is why all of it is made of bronze. It was a more durable metal and would handle the intense heat and carcasses better. But the inside of the tabernacle full of gold. All of the frames, the bases, the furniture and the implements were all covered in lustrous gold. This symbolizes deity. In the tabernacle God dwelt and the priests could go. But here, the bronze symbolizes judgment. This is where Israel could come and

gather. This is where sinners came with their sin offerings. Here, is where sin was dealt with. The altar of sacrifice made being in the courtyard possible, as near as they could come.

The Fence Marking the Courtyard (v.9-19)

"You shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side the court shall have hangings of fine twined linen a hundred cubits long for one side. ¹⁰ Its twenty pillars and their twenty bases shall be of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. ¹¹ And likewise for its length on the north side there shall be hangings a hundred cubits long, its pillars twenty and their bases twenty, of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. ¹² And for the breadth of the court on the west side there shall be hangings for fifty cubits, with ten pillars and ten bases. ¹³ The breadth of the court on the front to the east shall be fifty cubits. ¹⁴ The hangings for the one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. ¹⁵ On the other side the hangings shall be fifteen cubits, with their three pillars and three bases. ¹⁶ For the gate of the court there shall be a screen twenty cubits long, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework. It shall have four pillars and with them four bases. ¹⁷ All the pillars around the court shall be filleted with silver. Their hooks shall be of silver, and their bases of bronze. ¹⁸ The length of the court shall be a hundred cubits, the breadth fifty, and the height five cubits, with hangings of fine twined linen and bases of bronze. ¹⁹ All the utensils of the tabernacle for every use, and all its pegs and all the pegs of the court, shall be of bronze.

The courtyard of the tabernacle was around 75 feet by 150 feet. It was surrounded by a fence that was just over seven feet tall. The fence was made of sixty pillars set in sixty bronze bases. Hanging from silver hooks and fillets on the pillars were linen curtains strung between them. They were staked to the ground. This fence not only marked out the tabernacle courtyard, but hid its activities from view. An Israelite would be able to see the smoke rising from the burnt offerings, the top half of the tabernacle and the column of glory rising up into the heavens from the Ark of the Covenant.

The gate in the fence was an opening on the east side. It was thirty feet wide and was made of four pillars and the material hanging between them. It appears that when the courtyard was open, the gate portion was either moved forward or backward so that people could go around it and enter the fence.

The tabernacle and its courtyard invited the people to draw near while keeping them at a distance. The High Priest, once a year, could enter the inner room, the Holy of Holies. The ministering priests could enter the outer room of the tabernacle. The people whether Jew or Gentile who had received the sign of the covenant could enter the courtyard, offer their sacrifices and mingle with the priests. But those who have not been circumcised were not allowed to enter the courtyard at all. So here is not only a fenced and fearsome mountain, but even the portable worship center was fenced. Those who wanted to draw near could not come close. This is the privilege and the great problem of the Old Covenant. But thank God, that was then and this is now.

The Oil Supplying the Lamp's Fuel (v.20-21)

"You shall command the people of Israel that they bring to you pure beaten olive oil for the light, that a lamp may regularly be set up to burn.²¹ In the tent of meeting, outside the veil that is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the LORD. It shall be a statute forever to be observed throughout their generations by the people of Israel.

Finally, the people of Israel were commanded to ensure that the priests attending the tabernacle had the pure, virgin, beaten olive oil to fuel the lamps in the tabernacle. Never were all these lights to go out. They were to be tended and serviced by the priests. As long as the tent of meeting was pitched, its lamps were to burn brightly.

Conclusion What is the Tabernacle all about? An anatomical layout of the soul? Is the inner man constructed this way with the inner core being where our spirit and the Spirit of God dwells? No, this has little support in the rest of Scripture. A map of the cosmos? I suppose it is possible that the layout of the tabernacle reflects the layout of the cosmos in some way. Certainly it is neither a geography nor an astronomy. But it does tell us that God is at the center, His people are safely in the courtyard near Him and outside are all the lost. But let us not get lost in this kind of inferential speculation when we do know for certain what it was intended to represent.

The tabernacle points us to the true tabernacle, the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider John 1:14-18. *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.' ") And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."* [ESV] The word, "dwelt, means "tabernacled". God tented among us in the incarnation. But rather than being veiled, His holy tabernacle was a bright light revealing grace and truth, a sustaining bread to be partake of by faith and the sacrifice on the altar of the cross.

Jesus is the one way, the only gate. The only access into the true heavenly tabernacle is through Jesus Christ. There is no going around the fence. There is no other way into the God's presence. No one or nothing else can serve as the gate. Jesus is the only way to enter into God's presence and please Him.

Hear then the author of Hebrews as we conclude: (Hebrews 9:1-15, NLT)

That first covenant between God and Israel had regulations for worship and a place of worship here on earth. There were two rooms in that Tabernacle. In the first room were a lampstand, a table, and sacred loaves of bread on the table. This room was called the Holy Place. Then there was a curtain, and behind the curtain was the second room called the Most Holy Place.

In that room were a gold incense altar and a wooden chest called the Ark of the Covenant, which was covered with gold on all sides. Inside the Ark were a gold jar containing manna, Aaron's staff that sprouted leaves, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Above the Ark were the cherubim of divine glory, whose wings stretched out over the Ark's cover, the place of atonement. But we cannot explain these things in detail now.

When these things were all in place, the priests regularly entered the first room as they performed their religious duties. But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. By these regulations the Holy Spirit revealed that the entrance to the Most Holy Place was not freely open as long as the Tabernacle and the system it represented were still in use.

This is an illustration pointing to the present time. For the gifts and sacrifices that the priests offer are not able to cleanse the consciences of the people who bring them. For that old system deals only with food and drink and various cleansing ceremonies—physical regulations that were in effect only until a better system could be established.

So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. By his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.

Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a young cow could cleanse people's bodies from ceremonial impurity. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. That is why he is the one who mediates a new covenant between God and people; so that all who are called can receive the eternal inheritance God has promised them. For Christ died to set them free from the penalty of the sins they had committed under that first covenant.