

Bible Study # 44 Exodus 26.1–14 03–29–2021

The narrative at this point picks up with the mention in 25:9 concerning ‘the dwelling place’, a word that was translated in the Vulgate by *tabernaculum*, and hence into English (via Luther) as ‘tabernacle’. Sometimes the term can refer to the whole sanctuary, but here it is used more strictly in reference to the ten curtains that had the cherubim woven into them.

The outer perimeter of the surrounding courtyard is described later (27:9-19). The curtains were placed over frames (vv. 15-29), and then there was a triple covering of goats’-hair curtains, rams’ skins, and finally, seal (or, porpoise) skins.

The main covering of the Tent consisted of ten curtains made from twisted linen and colored yarn – blue, purple, and scarlet. Images of the cherubim were worked into them. The size of the curtains was uniform – twenty-eight cubits long (1232 cm), and four cubits wide (176 cm).

They were joined together in two sets of five, which were then linked by means of loops on the end-curtains, with gold clasps holding them in position so that the ‘dwelling place’ was a single unit (lit. ‘and the *mishkân* was one’). These linen curtains were, in effect, the inner lining of the tabernacle.

Over the linen was a covering made from goats’ hair. Eleven curtains were required, and each was twenty-eight cubits long and four cubits wide. This meant that these curtains were two cubits longer than the linen covering.

These curtains were joined in a similar way to the linen ones (cf. vs. 3-7 with 9-11), but with bronze clasps and not golden ones. The eleventh curtain was folded double at the entrance. The larger size of this curtain meant that it more than covered the linen curtains on each of the four sides.

The final verse in this section (v. 14) notes that three additional coverings were provided as well. One was made from rams’ skins that were dyed red. As with other references to color, no indication is given of any specific significance of the color ‘red’.

There was a fourth item as well, ‘a covering of hides of sea cows’. The exact nature of this final covering is uncertain, as the variety of translations in the English versions testify. The Hebrew word may refer to a sea animal (dolphin, or porpoise) or to a specific kind of leather made from animal skins. In the Old Testament, it is used only for the covering of the Tent of Meeting, or for the making of sandals (Ezek. 16:10).

No mention is made of any supports for the covering to prevent it sagging. It is possible that there was some form of ridgepole resting on pillars, or else the two top covers (rams’ skin and hides of sea cows) were longer and so could be pulled tightly and pegged to the ground. No measurements are given for these two coverings.

We will study Exodus 26.15–37 next.