

Exodus 26:1–37 and 36:8–38

Introduction

Yahweh is the God who desires to dwell with and among His people as family. In Exodus chapter 25 we read these wonderful, awesome, beautiful words:

- Exodus 25:8–9 — And let them make me a sanctuary [sacred space], that I may dwell [settle] in their midst. Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

This is the overarching, underlying, all-encompassing, omnipresent theme of all these chapters in which the plan of the Tabernacle is first described in detail, and then also in which the plan of the Tabernacle is followed exactly. This theme of the God who dwells in the heavens coming to settle in the midst of His people on earth is what guides, and informs, and blesses all our reading of these chapters. Who could have ever thought? Who could have ever imagined?

Over the past two weeks, we've seen three pieces of furniture that would eventually find their place in God's house. First, the Ark of the Covenant with the atonement plate on top, overshadowed by the wings of the two cherubim. And then the table with the meal perpetually laid out on it and the lampstand designed as a flowering tree whose fruit is light. There will be one more piece of furniture to be placed in God's house, but we won't come to that for another four chapters. (cf. 30:1-10) For right now, we move from the furniture to the tabernacle itself.

I. The Tabernacle Curtains

- A. Exodus 26:1 — 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.

The sides and the ceiling of this tabernacle—this dwelling place—are to consist of the most beautiful and luxurious curtains imaginable. The Hebrew word for “fine twined linen” is actually borrowed from the Egyptian language. “Some linen found in Egyptian tombs has 152 threads per inch [just] in the warp as compared to only 86 threads per inch in the most finely woven modern techniques.” (Kaiser) Of course, we don't know the actual thread count of the tabernacle curtains, but we do know that it was very, very high even by today's standards – maybe even far surpassing today's standards. So, obviously, this explains why it was called “fine twined linen.” Not only were the curtains themselves made from linen of the highest quality, but they were embroidered with yarns (or threads) that had been dyed the colors blue, purple, and scarlet. Or, it's possible that the linen itself was made from these colorful threads. Now we have to remember that there were no synthetic dyes available for purchase online! “‘Blue’ was “a color derived from... a shellfish, variously described as sky blue, deep dark blue, blue-purple, or bright violet.” (Kaiser) “‘Purple’ [was a color] derived from the secretion of a gland of the murex snail and was supplied primarily by the Phoenicians. It [was] a purple-red.” “‘Scarlet,’ or crimson, [was a color] derived from the eggs and bodies of [a] worm... [that] attaches itself to the leaves of the holly plant. Their maggots are collected, dried, and pulverized; and the powder produces a

bright red (or yellow-red) dye.” (Kaiser) Whatever the exact shades and hues of these colors, the one thing we can be sure of is that they were striking, and rich, and beautiful to behold – *although* they were never to be seen except by the priests.

Finally, we learn that these richly colored, finely woven curtains are to have cherubim “skillfully worked into them.” The emphasis of “skillfully” is that this is to be a very elaborate, and detailed and intricate work. (cf. Currid) These curtains will be as awe-inspiring as any curtains of the time [and probably even of our time] could possibly be. They will be rich, and beautiful, and befitting of royalty. Indeed, the cherubim all along the ceiling and the sides of the tabernacle are symbolic of the whole heavenly court – the angelic attendants of God in His heavenly throne room. And so the curtains tell a story. They tell us where we are—or where we *would* be *if* we could be standing inside. They tell us that we’re standing in the Yahweh’s dwelling – in the chambers of the King.

And yet, for all the luxury and beauty of these curtains, we still have to point out that they *are* **curtains**. A “house” whose “ceiling” and “walls” are *curtains*; the kind of curtains associated in the Bible with a common, everyday tent. (cf. Jer. 4:20; 10:20-21; 49:29) We go on to read in verses 2-6:

- B. **Exodus 26:2–6** — The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits [42 ft.], and the breadth of each curtain four cubits [6 ft.]; all the curtains shall be the same size. Five curtains shall be coupled to one another [30 ft. x 42 ft.], and the other five curtains shall be coupled to one another [sewn together?]. 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. 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. And you shall make fifty clasps of gold, and couple the curtains one to the other with the clasps [60 ft. x 42 ft.], so that the **tabernacle** may be a single whole.

On the one hand, it’s obviously very important that the tabernacle be a “**single whole**” (we’ll come back to this idea later on in Exodus). On the other hand, the Tabernacle curtains are to be in **two “sets”** (30 ft. x 42 ft. each) that are joined together by a series of fifty matching pairs of loops and fifty clasps made of gold. If it’s so important that this royal house be a **single whole**, then **why** should we have **two separate sets** of curtains joined together by clasps? Indeed, why should Yahweh’s dwelling be made of *curtains* at all? We go on, now, to read in verse seven:

II. The Tent Curtains (over the Tabernacle Curtains)

- A. **Exodus 26:7** — You shall also make curtains of goats’ hair for a **tent** over the tabernacle; eleven curtains shall you make.

Even today, those who live and travel in the desert (Bedouins) will protect their fancier “inside” tent walls and ceiling with another outer tent made from the long hair of [long haired] goats – *just like* what we have here in Exodus. [See Picture on page 10] But the purpose of the goat’s

hair tent here in Exodus doesn't seem to be *only* for protecting the tabernacle from the outside elements. Look for the point that's most emphasized in verses 8-13:

- B. **Exodus 26:8–13** — The length of each curtain shall be **thirty cubits** [45 ft.], and the breadth of each curtain four cubits [6 ft.]. The **eleven** curtains shall be the same size. 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**. 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. 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. And **the part that remains** of the curtains of the **tent**, **the half curtain that remains**, shall **hang over the back of the tabernacle**. 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**.

The obvious emphasis in these verses is that the curtains of goat's hair are to **cover up completely** the tabernacle curtains of fine twined linen. Of course, one purpose for this is the same as that of the Bedouin tents that we see in pictures today, which is protection especially from blowing sand, and dirt, and debris, as well as moisture and rain. But in the case of *this* tent, there seems to be a *second*, very important purpose. The tent covers up completely all of the **cherubim** that have been skillfully working into the curtains of the tabernacle. In other words, the tent made of goat's hair is meant to shield even the symbols of Yahweh's royal court and attendants from any outside view. It shields these holy symbols not only from the weather, but from the eyes of sinful men and women. Even the angelic cherubim in the walls and ceiling of the tabernacle are to remain forever invisible to all but the priests.

Notice, again, how important it is that even this outer tent of the tabernacle should be a "**single whole**" (26:11; once again, we'll come back to this idea later on in Exodus). And yet, once again, the curtains of this tent are still to be in **two "sets"** (30 ft. x 45 ft. and 36 ft. x 45 ft.) joined together by fifty matching pairs of loops and fifty metal clasps — made this time, not of gold, but of bronze. If it's so important that this royal dwelling should be a **single whole**, then **why** have **two separate sets** of curtains joined together by clasps? Indeed, we have to ask again: Why should the dwelling place of Yahweh be made of **curtains** at all?

So we have the curtains of the tabernacle covered up completely by a tent of goat's hair. Now we go on to read in verse fourteen:

III. A "Covering" over the Tent

- **Exodus 26:14** — And you shall make for the tent [*made of goat's hair*] a **covering** of tanned rams' skins and a **covering** of goatskins on top.

These two outermost leather coverings would have been very effective at repelling water. And even should any water make it past them, it would have been very quickly and easily absorbed by the woolen curtains made from goat's hair. The effectiveness of these skins as a way of protecting against rain explains why they were also very commonly used as tent coverings by all

of the desert nomads and wanderers of the day. [See Picture on page 10] These were just the *common, everyday* materials for dwellings in the desert. And yet, as common as they might have been, it's unlikely that any desert nomad's dwelling would have been protected by no less than three separate layers of wool and skin.

Now, obviously, any dwelling with walls and a ceiling made of curtains requires a structure or a "skeleton" of some kind to support it. In the tents of the Bedouin nomads, this was a simple system of upright wooden poles. [See Picture on page 11] So, what will it be in the tent of Yahweh, Israel's King? We read in verses 15-29:

IV. Frames and Bars

- **Exodus 26:15–29** — You shall make upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood. Ten cubits shall be the length of a frame [15 ft.], and a cubit and a half the breadth of each frame [2 ft. 3 in.]. There shall be two tenons ["hands"] in each frame, for fitting together [for fitting the frames into their bases]. So shall you do for all the frames of the tabernacle. [Open frames would allow the fine linen with the Cherubim to be visible from inside the tabernacle.]

You shall make the frames for the tabernacle: twenty frames for the south side [45 ft.]; 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; and for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side twenty frames [45 ft.], and their forty bases of silver, two bases under one frame, and two bases under the next frame.

And for the rear of the tabernacle westward you shall make six frames [13 ft. 6 in. plus 1 ft. 6 in. for the corners = 15 ft.?]. And you shall make two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear; 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. And there shall be eight frames, with their bases of silver, sixteen bases; two bases under one frame, and two bases under another frame.

You shall make bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, 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. The middle bar, halfway up the frames, shall run from end to end [of each side of the tent]. [Did the bars above and below the middle bar consist of two smaller bars placed end to end (for a total of five bars)? If so, there would have been three levels of bars versus five.]

You shall overlay the frames with gold and shall make their rings of gold for holders for the bars [the bars were inserted into the rings that ran the length of the frames to keep the whole structure rigid], and you shall overlay the bars with gold.

On the one hand, it's just a tent. On the other hand, it's **not(!)** just a tent. No wandering desert traveler had supports for his tent as elaborate and as beautiful as these. A total of forty-eight frames, all fifteen feet tall, all overlaid with gold, set in ninety-six bases of silver, and all

connected and aligned with a system of gold plated bars. The elaborateness of the supports and the lavish materials of gold and silver are telling a story. They're telling us where we are—or where we *would* be *if* we could be standing inside. They're telling us that this is Yahweh's dwelling – these are the **chambers** of God, the King. And yet, *for all that*, it is *still* a **tent**. We go on to read in verses 31-34:

V. The Tabernacle Rooms and Arrangement of the Furniture

- A. **Exodus 26:31–34** — Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain. 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. [*The same materials and design as the tabernacle curtains.*] And you shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver. And you shall hang the veil from the clasps [the clasps connecting the two sets of curtains for the tabernacle], 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. You shall put the atonement plate on the ark of the testimony in the Most Holy Place.

We could say that there's the “**back** room” and the “**front** room.” The “**back room**” is the “Most Holy Place” with only one piece of furniture – the Ark of the Covenant with the atonement plate on top. The “**back room**” is the place of God's presence where He sits enthroned above the cherubim. The “**back room**” is, very simply, the “**throne room**” of Yahweh, Israel's Redeemer and King. So, then, what is the “front room”? We read in verse thirty-five:

- B. **Exodus 26:35** — And you shall set the table outside the veil [*in the holy place*], and the lampstand on the south side of the tabernacle opposite the table, and you shall put the table on the north side.

In the culture of the Bible times, hospitality was *most highly* valued. (cf. Gen. 18:1-8; 19:1-8) And a “tent dwelling” in the desert was the symbol, and even the embodiment of this hospitality. I read somewhere on the internet that “the Bedouin people believed that every traveler should be given shelter and protection from the relentless elements for at least *three days*.” And so it's with this background in mind that we can appreciate the furniture that we find in Yahweh's “front room” – a **table** set with a never ending supply of food and drink and a **lamp** that shines brightly all through the night. Here we have all the ingredients for hospitality in the desert. And yet, of course, this tent here in Exodus twenty-six is not the tent of just any desert nomad. It's the dwelling of Yahweh, Israel's King. So, if the “back room” is Yahweh's “throne room,” then we could say that the front room is His royal “**guest** room.” (cf. Ref. Study Bible; NIV Zondervan Study Bible; NASB Study Bible) As the Lord's “guest room,” the Holy Place is a picture of God's desire that we should enjoy to the fullest all the rich blessings of His house – of His dwelling in our midst.

And now there remains only one part of the tabernacle to be described. We read in verses 36-37:

- C. **Exodus 26:36–37** — 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. 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 veil separating the “guest room” from the “throne room” hung on only four pillars since it stretched from the inside of one wall to the inside of the other. But the screen for the entrance of the tent hung on five pillars because it stretched across the front of the tabernacle from outside edge to outside edge. *Unlike* the tabernacle curtains and the veil between the two rooms, the screen for the entrance does **not** have any cherubim on it – because the screen will be visible from the outside of the tabernacle. As symbols of God’s royal court and attendants, no cherubim are ever to be visible to anyone standing on the outside. But other than this one very important difference, we find that *just like* the curtains and the veil, the screen for the entrance is still made of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen. In fact, it’s especially noted that the screen was “*embroidered with needlework.*” This screen must have been as awe-inspiring as any entrance screen of that day [and probably even of our own day] could possibly be. This is a screen that tells a story. It’s proclaiming that here we have come to the **entrance** of Yahweh’s dwelling – to the chambers of the King. *And yet*, for all the luxury and beauty of the screen it is still just a screen – a screen, for a tent, for Yahweh the King. [See **Illustration on page 11**]

Conclusion

One person writes: “[The] tabernacle which Moses erected in the desert during the great trek of the Israelites from Egypt to Palestine was clearly no more than an elaborate nomad’s tent.” (Seale; quoted in Currid) On the one hand, it *was* an elaborate nomad’s tent, but on the other hand, it was also *more* than this: it was a nomad’s tent for **Yahweh** the King. But why? Why should this be?

Among the annual feasts that God gave to Israel to celebrate, there was one that was rather unique. We read in Leviticus twenty-three:

- Leviticus 23:33–34, 42–43 — The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, On the fifteenth day of this seventh month and for seven days is the **Feast of Booths** to the LORD... **You shall dwell in booths for seven days.** All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, **that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt:** I am the LORD your God.

The Hebrew word for “booths” can refer to any kind of temporary shelter. (cf. Neh. 8:14-17; Gen. 33:17-18; 1 Kings 20:12-21; Job 27:18; Jonah 4:5) In the case of Israel when God brought them out of the land of Egypt, these temporary shelters were, very simply, **tents**. (cf. Num. 1:52; Deut. 1:33) Tents could be very quickly and easily set up and taken down, and they weren’t too heavy or cumbersome for moving from place to place. With tents, the people could carry their homes with them as they travelled through the desert wilderness.

So what does it mean when the Creator of the universe, the Redeemer and King of Israel, comes down to make His dwelling in a tent – among a people living in tents? What does it mean to have rings and bars for carrying the Tabernacle furniture? What does it mean to have curtains that come apart in two separate sections for easier set up and take down? What does it mean to have

so many detachable, portable parts? — 48 frames, 96 bases for the frames, 15 bars for the frames; 100 clasps for the curtains, 9 pillars, 9 bases for the pillars, 9 hooks, and a veil and a screen, besides the curtains and coverings? What does it mean when the Creator of the universe, the Redeemer and King of Israel, comes down to make His dwelling in a **tent** – among a people living in tents?

It means that He has come down to **journey** and to **travel with us** through the desert – to move from place to place with us through the dangerous wilderness; no longer just from afar, as a pillar of cloud and fire in the sky, but now(!) dwelling even in His own tent, in the midst of our tents. **[See Illustration on page 12]** (cf. Num. 3:25-26, 36-37; 4:25-26, 29-32; 7:7-8; Durham; Stuart) The Bible describes us all as strangers and sojourners and exiles in this world. (cf. Heb. 11:13-16; 1 Pet. 2:9-11) And when we're setting off on a journey through a dangerous and hostile world and facing an unknown future, how wonderfully comforting it is to know that **wherever** we go, God Himself has promised to go with us; leading us, guiding us, protecting us, and inviting us to share in all the comforts and joys of His house along the way.

Now, after all this, maybe we're thinking to ourselves: "I wish the tabernacle was still here – God's tent in the midst of our tents. But once again, we've been reminded this morning that the tabernacle is "only"(!) a copy of something in the heavens – of something to be fulfilled in the coming of Christ. The Lord said to Moses: "Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan [the pattern] for it that you were shown on the mountain." (26:31) And so it was **in Christ** that God ultimately came and pitched His tent among us. And then, even when Jesus was about to depart from us and go back to the Father, this is what He said: "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mat. 28:20) How could this be? How could this be when Jesus was going away? Jesus said to His disciples:

- John 14:15–18, 23, 27 — If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth... You know him, for **he dwells with you and will be in you**. I will not leave you as orphans; **I will come to you**... If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and **we will come to him and make our home with him**... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

No matter where in the desert we should ever find ourselves, we can know that God is there with us; His tent is right there in our midst; and the table is always set, and the lights are always burning; and He will never, ever leave us or forsake us. Indeed:

- Hebrews 13:5–6 — [God] has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear."
- Psalms 23:1–6 — The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for **you are with me**; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my

cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and **I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

So, skipping ahead now to Exodus 37, we can read with a growing delight and joy:

Exodus 36:8–38

And all the craftsmen among the workmen **made** the tabernacle with ten curtains. They were made of fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns, with cherubim skillfully worked. The length of each curtain was twenty-eight cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits. All the curtains were the same size. He coupled five curtains to one another, and the other five curtains he coupled to one another.

He **made** loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain of the first set. Likewise he made them on the edge of the outermost curtain of the second set. He made fifty loops on the one curtain, and he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that was in the second set. The loops were opposite one another. And he **made** fifty clasps of gold, and coupled the curtains one to the other with clasps. So the tabernacle was a single whole.

He also **made** curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle. He made eleven curtains. The length of each curtain was thirty cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits. The eleven curtains were the same size. He coupled five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves. And he **made** fifty loops on the edge of the outermost curtain of the one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the other connecting curtain. And he **made** fifty clasps of bronze to couple the tent together that it might be a single whole. And he **made** for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins and goatskins.

Then he **made** the upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood. Ten cubits was the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the breadth of each frame. Each frame had two tenons for fitting together. He did this for all the frames of the tabernacle. The frames for the tabernacle he made thus: twenty frames for the south side. And he **made** forty bases of silver under the twenty frames, two bases under one frame for its two tenons, and two bases under the next frame for its two tenons. For the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, he made twenty frames and their forty bases of silver, two bases under one frame and two bases under the next frame.

For the rear of the tabernacle westward he **made** six frames. He **made** two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear. And they were separate beneath but joined at the top, at the first ring. He made two of them this way for the two corners. There were eight frames with their bases of silver: sixteen bases, under every frame two bases.

He **made** bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the tabernacle at the rear westward. And he made the middle bar to run from end to end halfway up the frames. And he overlaid the frames with gold, and made their rings of gold for holders for the bars, and overlaid the bars with gold.

He **made** the veil of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen; with cherubim skillfully worked into it he made it. And for it he **made** four pillars of acacia and overlaid them with gold. Their hooks were of gold, and he cast for them four bases of silver.

He also **made** a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, embroidered with needlework, and its five pillars with their hooks. He overlaid their capitals, and their fillets were of gold, but their five bases were of bronze.



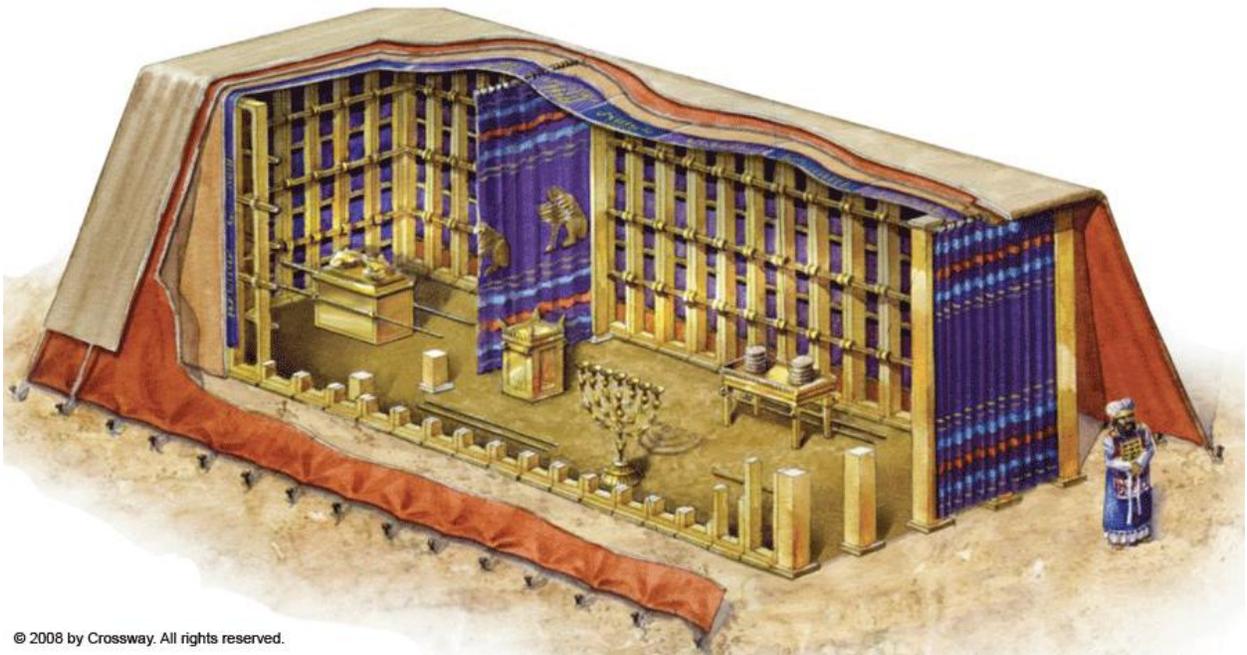
A Bedouin tent made of goats hair which covers and protects an inner and “fancier” set of curtains.



A tent made from goatskin



The Wooden support structure of a Bedouin tent



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An artist's conception of the Tabernacle



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Yahweh's tent in the midst of our tents