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BIBLICAL TOPICS FOR STUDY – THE TABERNACLE OF MOSES AND ITS MEANING

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First of all, I would like to make it clear that this is one of the most difficult and controversial topics, even among theologians, because many of the materials used in the Tabernacle (such as fabrics, dyes, skins and animal hair) have a very uncertain meaning in the Hebrew language. The exaggerated number of Bible versions that we have today, with the excuse of purifying the text, instead of clarifying it, end up raising more doubts. Therefore, certain questions cease to be important to us as Christians. What matters is **the spiritual meaning of the Tabernacle** for us today, that is, how we can be the true sanctuary for the Spirit of God.

It is worth remembering that the OT was a ‘shadow’ of the NT (Col. 2: 16-17; Heb. 10: 1), that is, a ‘draft’ (we can say so) of the spiritual reality experienced in the NT. Since the vision of that time was carnal and material, God needed to teach through physical things. The people needed symbols, tangible things to believe in the Lord. That is why Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel acted out their prophecies. Today, we have the understanding of invisible things.



Notes:

The Bible Version used here is NRSV, complemented by NIV.

In many texts we'll also use 'Lexicon Strong's Concordance.' Strong's Concordance is a concordance of the King James Bible (KJV), created by the English

theologian Dr. James Strong (1822-1894), along with a team of theologians, and first published in 1890. It is about a cross-reference between each word in the KJV and the original text in Hebrew or Greek. To each word in its original language is given an entry number for the biblical concordance of KJV. Lexicon means a dictionary of ancient classic languages. In order to interpret Lexicon Strong's Concordance properly it's necessary to take into account the cultural context of that time, because Strong's numbers do not consider figures of speech, metaphors, idioms, common phrases, cultural references, references to historical events, or alternate meanings used by the writers of that time period to express their thoughts in their own language (source: wikipedia.org).

It will also be used the Concordant Hebrew English Sublinear (CHES), based on the vocabulary of the Concordant Version of the Old Testament (CVOT), the transliterated Hebrew.

The measure of length used at that time was the cubit, which is the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger of a man, ranging from 44.4 to 45 cm, or even 51.8 cm (18 inches – Ezekiel 43: 13 a cubit plus a handbreadth), used for sacred purposes and also called Mosaic cubit or Primitive cubit or Ezekiel cubit. In this text about the Tabernacle I'll consider the cubit as 50 cm, in order to facilitate understanding. One verse that corroborates this hypothesis is 2 Chr. 3: 3, which says that the primitive cubit ('cubits of the old standard') was used by Solomon when he built the Temple; therefore, before Ezekiel's birth, hence a measure that was already known by the Israelites, probably from the time of the Tabernacle of Moses.

The Tabernacle

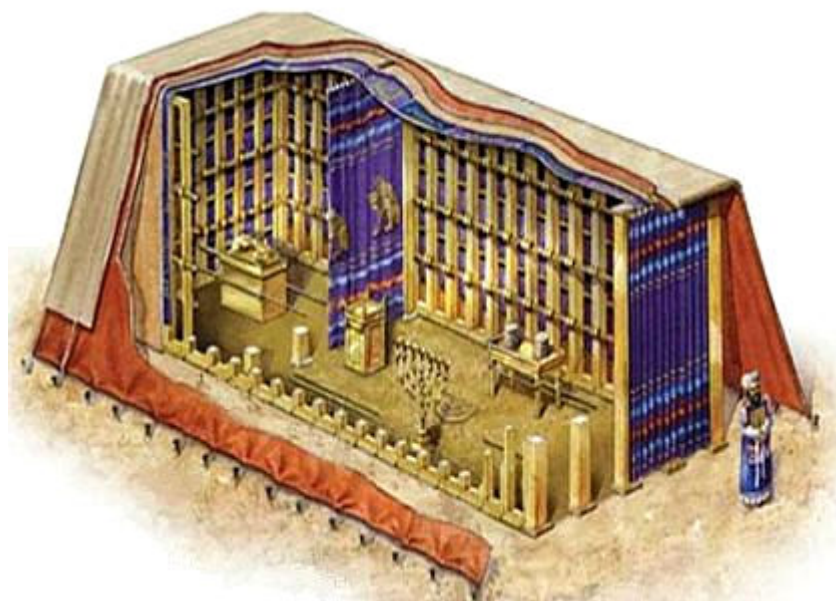
In Ex. 25: 8-9, the Lord commanded Moses to build the Tabernacle. Tabernacle (in Hebrew, *mishkan*, which means 'dwelling house') or 'Tent of Meeting' was the tent used by the Israelites as a place of worship while they traveled through the desert. In fact, the tent where Moses initially met the Lord ('the tent of meeting') was pitched outside the camp (Ex. 33: 7), for the people had sinned, and the Lord told him that He would not follow among them. So, Moses pitched the tent outside the camp, and there, God spoke to him. Everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting (Ex.33: 7). In Ex. 29: 42-46, the Lord said to Moses that it would be in the Tabernacle (or tent of meeting) that He would descend to talk to His servant and to His people. The Tabernacle was also called 'sanctuary' (Ex. 25: 8) and 'The tent of the Covenant' because in it the Covenant or the Testimony was stored (the tablets of the Law): Ex. 38: 21; Num. 1: 50; Num. 9: 15; Num. 17: 8. Later, the Tabernacle came to be known as 'the House of the Lord' (Deut. 23: 18; Josh. 6: 24). God commanded Moses to build the Tabernacle so that the people could have a place of reference for worship and could feel His safety along with them wherever they walked (Ex. 25: 8). The Tent was pitched and carried by the Levites, and cared for by them. In the innermost place was the enclosure known as the Holy of Holies where the ark was placed and where only the high priest could enter. Its dimensions (the sanctuary itself, the tent where the Ark of the Covenant was placed) were basically five meters wide, fifteen meters long and five meters high (Ex. 26: 15-30).

Materials used in its construction

The basic material to the structure of the Tabernacle was the wood, more exactly, **Acacia wood**.

In Ex. 26: 16 the bible gives us the measure of the frames (boards). Taking into account the cubit of fifty centimeters each frame measured ten cubits length (which, in fact, is the height, because they were placed vertically – Ex. 26: 15); so, each frame had five meters high. In width they were of one cubit and a half, therefore, seventy-five centimeters.

In Ex. 26: 18; 20; 22 (or Ex 36: 20-34), the bible talks about the numbers of the frames (boards) to the south, to the north and to the west (NIV, ‘for the far end, that is, the west end of the Tabernacle’) because the anterior side, that is, the entrance was to the east side, to the side of the sunrise. Considering twenty frames in each side (North and south), the Tabernacle was fifteen meters length. Its height would be the same than the frames’ (five meters tall), and the width (measure of the west of the Tabernacle – six frames plus 2 for each corner – Ex. 26: 23; 25), approximately five meters. Therefore, the walls of the north, south and west sides of the Tabernacle were made of acacia wood frames (boards), placed vertically on silver bases (two for each frame – Ex. 26: 21). Each silver base weighed one talent, that is, 35 kilograms – Ex. 38: 27) and fitted together (“There shall be two pegs in each frame to fit the frames together; you shall make these for all the frames of the tabernacle” – Ex. 26: 17), and four bars (clapboards, beams) of the same wood, which passed through rings on the frames. The fifth one (the center crossbar) extended from end to end at the middle of the frames instead of through the gold rings (Ex 26: 28). The frames and the five bars of each side and the posterior side (Ex. 26: 26-27) were covered with gold, and the rings were also made of gold (Ex. 26: 15-29). The weigh of the silver bases was sufficient to maintain the whole structure firm.



However, it is interesting to notice that the Hebrew word that for us was translated as boards (NRSV, frames) is *qerāshīm* (‘the hollow tapers’ – CVOT; Strong #7175 – *qeresh*, in singular = bench, board. From an unused root meaning to split off; a slab or plank), which means that the boards were not solid boards all around the Tabernacle, but pillars placed on the two silver bases for each one of them, and joined by transverse bars uniting the whole structure, and arranged in an equidistant manner (in Hebrew, *shawlab*’) from each other. This would have the following advantages over solid boards: 1) they were much lighter and thus less subject to warping; 2) instead of hiding the

embroidered curtains (1st covered which we will discuss shortly after), they formed a panel favoring the curtains to be seen from inside. Why should we hide the curtains behind solid wood planks? The bars ran on the two lateral sides and the posterior side of the frame (the whole structure), going through gold rings attached to the boards. The middle bar was placed horizontally in the whole length of the side of the framework, but the other four bars were smaller. They formed a single structure.

We could explain what was said above in a schematic way for better understanding:



Layout of the wooden frame of the Tabernacle of Moses, with two silver bases for each board

Upon these boards **coverings in linen and animal skins** were placed:

- **Ten linen curtains** in blue, purple, and crimson (NIV, scarlet) yarns, and drawings of cherubim (cf. Ezek. 41: 18-19 – ‘young lion’), and fastened with gold clasps (Ex. 26: 1-6; Ex. 36: 8-13). In Ex. 26: 2 the bible tells the size of the curtains: twenty-eight cubits length and four cubits width, that is, fourteen meters length and two meters width. They were in number of ten, and fastened together so that the Tabernacle was a unit (Ex. 26: 6). This means a unique structure. Throughout the length two groups of five curtains were sewn together. The loops and gold clasps bound one group to the other.

- **Eleven curtains of goats’ hair** and fastened with bronze clasps (Ex 26: 7-11), also called ‘the tent over the tabernacle’ (Ex 26: 7). In Ex. 26: 8 the bible gives us the size of the coverings of goats’ hair: each one had thirty cubits length and four cubits wide, that is, fifteen meters length and two meters wide. These curtains were also sewn along the length of the Tabernacle into two groups, one with five curtains and one with six curtains, which were joined together at the half of the tent’s length.

- **A covering of tanned rams’ skins** (NRSV – Ex. 25: 5; Ex. 26: 14; Ex. 35: 7; Ex. 35: 23; Ex. 36: 19; Ex. 39: 34). As for the measures of the tanned rams’ skins, the bible doesn’t provide us these data.

• **An outer covering of fine leather** (Ex. 25: 5; Ex. 26: 14; Ex. 35: 7; Ex.36: 19; Ex. 39: 34). The bible also says in NIV (Ex. 35: 23): ‘hides of sea cows (namely, dugongs).’ As for the measurements of the fine leather coverings, the Bible does not provide us with this data either.

Let’s begin, talking about the wood that was used. **Wood** symbolizes something that is taken from the earth, the matter, a tree, therefore, a perishable material, mortal, human. In the case of the Tabernacle, it was built with Acacia wood frames, greatly found in Sinai where God spoke to Moses. All the furniture of the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon was built with acacia wood, as indicated by divine revelation to Moses. Acacia is a tree of many species. It was the tree that supplied the wood to the Hebrew people, the sacred and fragrant wood of Shittim. Shittim also refers to a place of idolatry and immorality in front of Jericho, on the plains of Moab, to the east of the Jordan River. There is a prophecy in Joel 3: 18: “In that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the Wadi Shittim (‘Valley of the Acacia’).” This means that after sincere repentance, the people that were depraved before will receive the life-giving water on the Lord’s Day.



Acacia nilotica in the desert of Negev to the south of Israel

Initially Acacia comprised a group of species of native plants of Africa (Egypt), Australia, Arabia and Palestine with the first species: *Acacia nilotica* described by Linnaeus. Later, other species were discovered. Then the African lineage came to be called *Vachellia*. *Vachellia nilotica* (widely known as *Acacia nilotica* or by the common names of the tree, such as gum arabic, Egyptian bramble or thorny acacia) is a species of *Vachellia* native to Africa, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. In addition to be used as an edible seed, people use the gum from the tree; and the wood is used for weapons, fuel and musical instruments. Acacia is a small tree or shrub of the Fabaceae family, subfamily Mimosoideae, genus *Acacia*. It’s a tree of the genus of tropical and subtropical legumes, having composite and small leaves and bunches of small yellow or white flowers. Depending on the climate, species can be widely used as ornamental plants.

The word 'acacia' (Shittah – Strong #7848) appears 28 times in the OT, often related to the Tabernacle: Ex. 25: 5; 10; 13; 23; 28; Ex. 26: 15; 26; 32; 37; Ex. 27: 1; 6; Ex. 30: 1; 5; Ex. 35: 7; 24; Ex. 36: 20; 31; 36; Ex. 37: 1; 4; 10; 15; 28; Ex 38: 1; 6; Deut. 10: 3; Isa. 41: 19.

The word for bush in Hebrew is Sneh (the same root as the name 'Sinai'), which literally means 'bush', 'shrub' or 'thorn bush.' The plant found in Sinai, where God spoke to Moses is the Seneh, also known as Shittah (in the singular; or Shittim, in the plural, meaning 'The Acacia' and refers to *Acacia nilotica* (or *Vachellia nilotica*).



The flower of *Acacia nilotica*

Then, we can understand that, as the sanctuary of the Living God on earth, we are fragile flesh, sinful, this tabernacle of perishable material like the dust of the earth, but overlaid with the most precious of God which is the same Spirit that was in Jesus (the gold that covered the wood). **Gold** in the bible, in most cases, refers to things that were placed in the Tabernacle or in the temple, precious spoils of war or taxes to be paid to an empire. Therefore, it gives us an idea of **something very precious**, something more directly **set apart for God** or very important to a nation, as a ransom, for example. It symbolizes **the Glory of God**.

The bible also says that the wood frames were placed vertically on **silver** bases. There were forty silver bases for twenty frames in the south and in the north, as well as two silver bases for each frame in the far end of the Tabernacle. This metal was used for the clasps, loops and the rings that supported the curtains of the courtyard of the Tabernacle, and the bases for the wood frames which we spoke of. **Silver** is the second of the noble metals after gold. It does not stain in a pure atmosphere, and can be polished to reflect like a mirror. The refining process can mean **obedience** to God. So, **the frames placed on silver bases symbolize** our natural and carnal lives (spiritual lives too, of course) **supported by obedience to the Lord**, what makes us 'crucify' our flesh (To crucify is to make the decision not to satisfy our tastes and desires that lead to sin), our sin, and to be covered by His blood that sanctifies us and cleanses us every day of our journey on earth. In other words, it redeems us from sin. Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty shekels (pieces) **of silver**, did he not? For this price (Zech. 11: 12-13; Matt. 27: 9-

10), Jesus was condemned to death and with His blood He redeemed our lives. Therefore, besides symbolizing **obedience** to God, silver also means **redemption**. Thirty pieces of silver were the value of a slave's life (Ex. 21: 32).

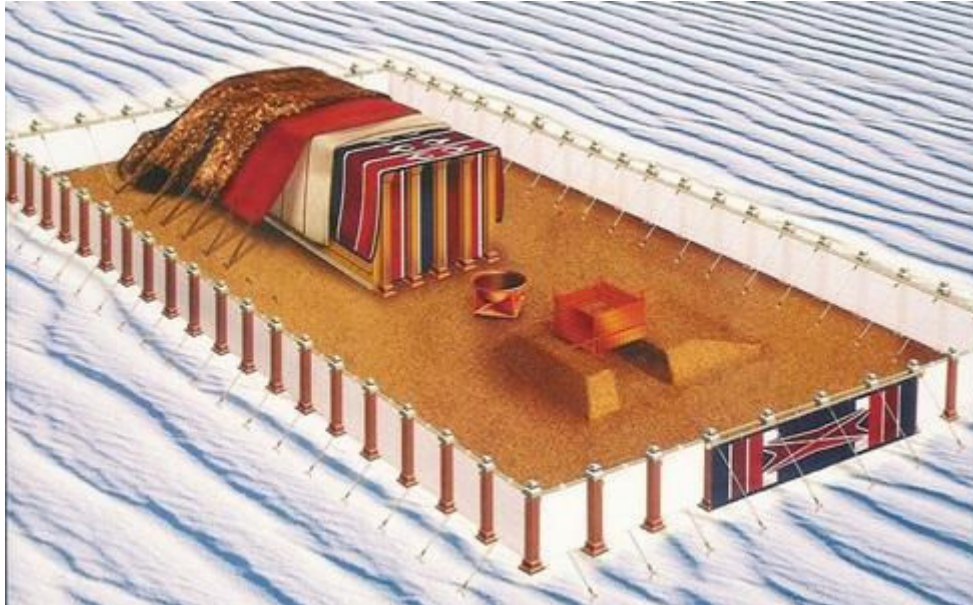
After all this, we can notice that the **1st covering of the Tent of Meeting** was constituted of **ten linen curtains** in blue, purple, and crimson (NIV, scarlet) yarns, and drawings of cherubim (cf. Ezek. 41: 18-19 – ‘young lion’), and fastened with gold clasps (Ex. 26: 1-6; Ex. 36: 8-13). Regarding the gold, we have already commented that it is the glory of God in the presence of His Holy Spirit, dwelling inside us, more specifically of our spirit, since gold covered the wood (the flesh). Our body is the house of our spirit, is it not?

These curtains were of fine linen, and the bible says that fine linen (bright and pure) is the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev. 19: 8). Therefore, by the action of the Spirit of God in us, there is purity, holiness and righteousness in our being. Linen was rarely made in Palestine; it was commonly imported from Egypt. The use of linen garments by the priests was given as guidance from God to Moses, and the people wove them with linen (its fiber) brought from Egypt. Samuel wore a linen ephod (1 Sam. 2: 18); David danced before the ark using a linen ephod (2 Sam. 6: 14). It seems indeed that the use of fine linen was associated with special people, holy ones. Linen and fine linen were reputed as precious gifts to a woman loved by a man (Ezek. 16: 10; 13, when God compares Jerusalem to His bride). Hence, as we said above, the bible says that the Lord has set apart for His Church, for His bride, garments of fine linen, bright and pure, because the fine **linen** is **the righteous deeds of saints** (Rev. 19: 8); therefore, **holiness**, not to mix with the ‘garments of sin’ of the world.

But we can notice that in this cloth of linen there were yarns of many colors: purple, and crimson (NIV, scarlet) and blue. It also had drawings of cherubim. **Purple color** was much used in the garments of kings and priests; therefore, it speaks of **royalty**. **Crimson** or **red** (NIV, **scarlet**) relates to the color of blood, both the animals that were offered in sacrifice and the blood of Jesus, the Holy Lamb and without stain, who was slain because of us. This speaks of **surrender, submission, donation to God, total and unconditional surrender to His will**. The last color is **blue**, which is related to the sky, to God's dwelling and, obviously, His **divinity** and the **Holy Spirit**. Ezekiel had the vision of God's throne as a sapphire, whose color is blue (Ezek. 1: 26-28: “And above the dome over their heads there was something like a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form. Upward from what appeared like the loins I saw something like gleaming amber, something that looked like fire enclosed all around; and downward from what looked like the loins I saw something that looked like fire, and there was a splendor all around. Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendor all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone speaking”). Another interesting comment about the **blue color** as a **correspondent to God's throne** is in Ex. 24: 9-10 when Moses, Aaron, his sons and the elders came up to Sinai by order of God to confirm His covenant with His people. The text says: “Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness.” Sapphire is blue.

Finally, there were drawings of **cherubim** on the linen curtains. Cherubim (in Hebrew, k^erūbhīm, plural of ‘cherub’ = heavenly, celestial) are celestial beings, and in the book of Genesis it is written that they had the responsibility to guard the way to the tree of life [*symbol of Jesus*] in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3: 24), and were placed over

the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25: 18-22; Heb. 9: 5) to protect the sacred objects stored in it (1 Sam. 4: 4; 2 Sam. 6: 2; 2 Kin. 19: 15; Ps. 80: 1; Ps. 99: 1). The name ‘cherubim’ indicates **a class of angels** with great strength of **knowledge, wisdom and divine light** and that reflect the beauty of the Creator. Therefore, it is said that they are knowledgeable of the divine mysteries (“full of eyes”, as the prophet Ezekiel said). Ezekiel describes a cherub as ‘young lion’ (Ezek. 41: 18-19).



So, we can **summarize** this way: **the first covering** of the Tabernacle had linen curtains in blue, purple, and crimson (NIV, scarlet) yarns, and drawings of cherubim. This means that, besides the presence of the Holy Spirit in our spirit (**‘gold’**; ‘the treasure in clay jars’, as the Apostle Paul says: 2 Cor. 4: 7), bringing us redemption, sanctification and purification through obedience (**silver** bases), we received from the Lord the blessing and the responsibility of keeping His purity, righteousness and holiness (**fine linen**), His royalty (**purple**), that is, the ability to carry out His authority on earth, as well as the ability of self-donation, of surrender to God’s will (**crimson**) e the adoption as children, the mark of His divinity on us (**blue color**). Furthermore, we know that we are protected by His **angels** and that we can reflect the beauty and the glory of the Lord and understand His mysteries, when we receive and use His wisdom correctly.

All this can only be seen by who is inside the tent, i.e., we alone can see completely without barriers what was placed by God in our interior.

Purple = royalty.

Crimson or red (NIV, scarlet) = surrender, submission, donation to God, total and unconditional surrender to His will.

Blue = God’s divinity; a color related to the Holy Spirit, corresponds to God’s throne.

Fine linen and white color = purity, righteousness and holiness.

The **second covering** placed over the Tabernacle was composed of eleven curtains of **goats’ hair** and fastened with **bronze** clasps (Ex 26: 7-11), also called ‘the tent over the tabernacle’ (Ex 26: 7).

Let's talk a bit about the animal, the she-goat ('ez, in Hebrew), although the same Hebrew word in the plural (ozim) can hint that it is about the masculine gender (goat's hair – male goats). The goat and she-goat are ruminant animals, both considered clean, and used for the sin offering, or rather, the sins of ignorance (Unintentional sins) of a prince (a male goat – Lev. 4: 22-23) or ordinary people ('a female goat' – Lev. 4: 27-28). The original word translated as ignorance means: to wander, like a sheep that strays from the flock. It refers to the sin originated from the weakness of human character, not an ill-disguised rebellion or a premeditated evil. We associate guilt with intention, but the ancients associated it to its effects.

The cub is called kid (goat kid). The two sexes have beard and horn with sharp inner edge. They are tame animals (domesticated) and much appreciated by nomads in the Middle East, who benefit from their meat, milk and wool (The races mohair and cashmere have silky and soft wool), used in the production of clothing; breeds with rougher hair are more used to make carpets, curtains and tents. Goats and she-goats can also have long or short hair, depending on their habitat and control of the goat breeders. The skin (leather) is used in the manufacture of gloves, footwear and other related products. Compared to the ram, the goat has a lighter constitution (it weighs between 45 and 55 kilograms) and its hair is a bit smoother. For she-goats and goats, the most favorable region to find them is the hill country, although this is even more applicable to the wild goats.

The she-goats of Syria are usually black. They are animals able to climb steep terrain and rocks without slipping, in addition to their lungs are developed to high altitudes. Their thick fur protects them from the cold; the altitude protects them from predators and, because of their natural resistance, they are able to adapt to extreme conditions (heat and cold). Goat and she-goat feed on grass and shrubs, often a rough and sparse grass, where cows and sheep could not graze. Goats are great explorers and can find their own food. The biggest problem with these animals is that they deplete the pasture, if the shepherd doesn't have much experience in dealing with them. Generally, they live in small flocks of up to twenty animals. A flock of she-goats, though small, is led by a goat (a male animal) and is metaphorically called 'leader' in Jer. 50: 8, Zech. 10: 3: "Flee from Babylon, and go out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be like male goats leading the flock"... "My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders [KJV, 'the goats']; for the Lord of hosts cares for his flock, the house of Judah, and will make them like his proud war-horse."

Bringing all this to our reasoning about the Tabernacle, we can say that this second covering is no longer related to the spiritual qualities in us, but to the qualities placed by God in our character, our personality, our soul, making us different from one another, like she-goats are different from she-goats, male goats from male goats, and male goats are different from rams, but in general, **they cooperate with the spirit**, that is, the qualities present in the soul, in the character one each of us, which are not externally visible by people (like the covering of goats' hair wasn't visible from outside), but give us resistance to the adverse conditions of nature and human existence on earth, and the protection to what is most precious, which is our salvation, our faith in God and our intimacy and communion with Him. In other words, we are talking about something that individualizes us and covers our true 'self' (our spirit) lest to lose the holiness and purity, i.e., the thoughts and values we have in our soul, which protect us from the harmful and confusing influences of everything that comes from outside to make our temple dirty. It's not about the foibles of the flesh ('wood'), as we talked previously, but something that is strengthened by God Himself in us as a truth for our lives, and keeps our target on focus, keeps us strong and positioned, not to be 'led along with the wind'.

That's why this second covering of the tent was composed of eleven curtains of goats' hair and fastened to the ground with **bronze** clasps (Ex. 26: 7-11).

One of the characteristics in question is the ability to be a **'tamable person' in the hands of the Lord**. Other characteristics drawn from the example of goats: to have **perseverance and determination** to achieve our purpose of life; to learn how **to live 'in the high places'**, away from the mundane carnality; to learn **'to breathe the things of the Spirit'** (lungs developed to high altitudes), that is, to acknowledge that there is life only in the inspirations and in the words that flow from the throne of God for us; to know how **to select the food** that is good to us and not to be greedy for the material things like the wicked who, in their voracity (eagerness) 'deplete the pasture', for they don't have a Good Shepherd to guide them.

Since the goat is an animal for sacrifice, likewise with us it's also a sacrifice **to deliver** our deformities of character, our opinions and inner values **in God's hands** to be molded, even knowing that this is necessary for our growth. The same way that this covering wasn't seen from inside of the Tabernacle, and we said that it is in the soul (metaphorically speaking), all these contents are often unconscious to us. Hence, their delivery to God is a sacrifice. It's the 'crucifixion' of our flesh. In other words, **this concerns our sacrifice**.

Summary of this covering – positive qualities of the flesh (soul) and the sacrifice of surrender to God of our inner values.

Let's talk now about **metals**, in special the copper:



Raw metals – gold, silver, copper and iron

The order in which the main metals entered into use was: gold (Gen. 2: 11), silver, copper (also known as bronze or brass that is, actually, an amalgam of copper and zinc – only later entered into use, around 1000 BC) and iron.

Copper was used to overlay the pillars of the courtyard, their bases and the altar for the burnt offerings. The washing basin and the clasps were of solid copper.

This metal is related to **God's judgment over sin**, and I'll talk with more details about this when I write about the Courtyard (Outer court). Except in the case of this second covering, copper was a metal used in outer court of the sanctuary, where the sacrifices were made on behalf of those who had sinned and needed God's forgiveness.

The bible often translates indifferently the word 'copper' in Hebrew (nehosheth or nchosheth – Ed 8: 27; in NRSV and NIV, bronze, while KJV translates as 'copper') by 'bronze' or 'brass' (nehushah or nchushah). In Deut. 8: 9 it is written: 'copper' (nehosheth – Strong #5178, both in NRSV and NIV, while KJV writes: brass). In Job 41: 27, the bible writes 'bronze' (NRSV and NIV) or 'brass' (KJV); and in Hebrew, nehushah or nchushah – Strong#5154, that is, bronze or brass. In Ezek. 1: 4, the bible perhaps describes the true 'brass' (a yellow alloy of copper and zinc) or 'bronze' (a yellowish-brown alloy of copper with up to one-third tin). The word used by Ezekiel is hashmal ('gleaming amber' or 'gleaming metal' or 'as the colour of amber' in our translation). Hashmal or chashmal, Strong #2830 means: bronze or polished spectrum metal: amber). Amber is a tree resin, dried and hardened by the time, where we find insects and plants preserved unchanged.



Bronze and amber

The **third covering** placed over the Tabernacle was a **covering of tanned rams' skins** (NRSV – Ex. 25: 5; Ex. 26: 14; Ex. 35: 7; Ex. 35: 23; Ex. 36: 19; Ex. 39: 34). As for the measures of the tanned rams' skins, the bible doesn't provide us with these data. It's a bit difficult to interpret this verse the right way, for several bible translations describe it in different manner. For example, in English, depending on the bible version (Ex. 26: 14), the term used is different:

NRSV – **tanned rams' skins**. The skins of the animals were placed under the sun till they dried up. Hence, they looked like the red color (as if dyed in red), because they were burned by the sun. It's the only version that use the verb 'to tam' instead of 'to dye').

NVI – ram skins dyed red

KJV – rams' skins dyed red

ASV – rams' skins dyed red

Searching a bit about the two processes¹ (tanning and dyeing), we can see that tanning was used to dry animal skins, preparing them for use. Leather was rarely used to make tents (Ex 25: 5), but much used for making sandals, belts, military items such as helmets, slings, quivers, parts of chariots and shields (and then, anointing them with oil).

The tanning was a smelly task, so it was made outside the cities, where there was plenty of water. To the Jew, it was something ceremonially unclean, so Peter had to overcome his scruples and prejudice when he was hosted at the home of Simon the tanner, out of Joppa (Acts 9: 43; Acts 10: 6; Acts 10: 32). In the act of tanning the skins, first was removed the hair with an application of lime and some sulfates, and then used the acid juice of some trees such as linden or **Periploca secamine** (it seems to be extinct) to finish the removal of hair and fat. The leather dried in the sun for two or three days was treated with immersion in the juice of *Acacia nilotica* or in a compound prepared with the bark or leaves of pine or oak to make the leather soft (flexible). Sometimes they were dyed, and fine bags skins were colored with mineral salt, usually alum*, imported from the Dead Sea or Egypt. *Alum = a colorless astringent compound that is a hydrated double sulfate of aluminum and potassium, used in solution medicinally and in dyeing and tanning.

The dyeing was an art known to the Israelites since their stay in Egypt, when cloths used for the tabernacle were dyed scarlet (crimson) by juice of crushed insects, cochineal type found in oaks (Ex. 26: 1; Ex. 26: 31; Ex. 36: 8; Lev. 14: 4). This insect is also known as kermes, a prominence red and round that the female aphid makes on the leaves of an oak species, and from which is extracted a scarlet dye. The tyrian dye (related to the city of Tyre, in Phoenicia), also called 'imperial', of purple-black or violet-red color, prepared from the Purple and Murex mollusks found on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean, was mainly a Phoenician monopoly, and was used to dye costly clothes, which denoted the rank or nobility of its owner (Judg. 8: 26; Prov. 31: 22; Lk 16: 19; Rev. 18: 12; Rev. 18: 16). Each mollusk produces such a small amount of pigment that, according to one study, it was necessary around ten thousand mollusks to produce sufficient pigment for dyeing a mantle or cloak of a dark tone that could be called royal purple. This was the same purple used in the construction of the Tabernacle (Ex. 26: 31; Ex. 28: 5), the curtain of the temple, and the 'blue, purple, and scarlet' were variants of the same dye (2 Chr. 3: 14) as well as the cloak put on Jesus during His trial (Jn. 19: 2; Jn. 19: 5). The Hebrews employed the term loosely to refer to any color from reddish tone. The yellow dyes were made of the film of pomegranate of the earth, and the Phoenicians also used saffron. The blue was obtained from indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*), imported from Syria or Egypt, which, in turn, imported it from India. Rarely was used pigment from Chilazon (a shellfish).

Therefore, we can say with a high degree of certainty that this covering of the tabernacle was not of dyed wool but of tanned rams' skins, for it needed to be impermeable, and later we will see why; even because the bible says 'skins' (leather), and not 'hairs.'

¹ J. D. Douglas – The New Bible Dictionary, 2nd edition 1995.

Let's talk a little about the animal, the ram. It is the male of the sheep. They symbolize innocence, gentleness, fertility. The sheep is a responsive animal on affection, used in sacrifices, and are powerless without a shepherd. The ram is a little more aggressive than the sheep and has long and curved horns, which the priests used as trumpets (Josh. 6: 4) or as oil receptacle (1 Sam. 16: 1). The rams were most frequently used for sacrifices, more than the sheep. For example: Lev. 5: 15 – guilt offering, as a sacrifice for sacrilege (when a person commits a violation and sins unintentionally in regard to any of the Lord's holy things); Lev. 5: 18 – guilt offering, as a sacrifice for the sins of ignorance (when a person commits a wrongdoing against the Lord in any of the Lord's commands); Lev. 6: 6 – guilt offering, as a sacrifice for voluntary sins, such as to cheat the neighbor, theft, extortion, perjury etc.

Therefore, like any animal sacrificed on the altar, the ram was the substitute of man. The blood of the animal (any of them) has always been the substitute for man's blood who committed some kind of sin. And we can see something interesting here with the ram: it was the most widely used animal to the atonement for the sin of sacrilege (that is, against the holy things) and mandatory atonement for sins of ignorance that required restitution, cleansing the stains of these sins. The ram is also mentioned in the bible in Lev. 16: 3; Lev. 16: 5 (the Day of Atonement – the 10th day of the 7th month – Lev. 16: 29), along with the bull and two goats that were sacrificed by the sin of the priest and the congregation respectively. The ram was offered as a burnt offering. The burnt offering, more than atonement for sins of ignorance, was a voluntary act of worship, a demonstration of devotion, a commitment and complete submission to God (Phil. 2: 5-8: "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross"). In addition, the ram is also mentioned in Num. 7: 1, on the day that Moses had finished setting up the Tabernacle, and anointed and consecrated it with all its furnishings, and anointed and consecrated the altar with all its utensils. The ram was chosen as the animal for the burnt offering and for the Fellowship Offering (or peace offering). In Ezek. 43: 24-26, the ram was the animal chosen for the burnt offering at the consecration of the altar.

Let's repeat that covering the Tabernacle was not of dyed wool but of tanned rams' skins, something stiff, resistant, because it needed to be impermeable; impermeable to rain, the desert winds, the stones or anything that was thrown against the Tabernacle by wickedness (sacrilege). Metaphorically speaking, it is a protection to the holiness of God in us, a protection to our interior goods such as a house or any dwelling house is a refuge that protects the goods, furniture and even the lives of those who live within it. It means the covering that protects us from the worldly things and all that accuses us and requires of us some kind of restitution (remember Leviticus). **The red color** reminds the color of blood, the blood of Jesus justifying us from sin and all kinds of charges of men and demons. Following our reasoning: although we surrender to God and do the sacrifice of giving up our carnal desire so that His will may prevail, and submitting to His judgment ('curtains of goats' hair and fastened with bronze clasps'), despite the inner strength that He has placed within us as His truth to be obeyed, we can say that **this 3rd covering** of the tent represents **the protection of Jesus' blood**, which surpasses every effort and every sacrifice, and once and for all justified us from all sin, and canceled the record of debt that was against us (the devil claimed us) – Col. 2: 14-15: ... erasing the record [NIV: having canceled the written code, with its regulations] that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it."

Just as the ram was offered as a burnt offering, a voluntary act of **worship to God**, an expression of **devotion**, of **commitment** and **complete submission** to God, Jesus did all this for us and asks us **the devotion to Him and to our priesthood**, to our mission. This commitment to the Lord makes us 'impermeable' to the 'inclement weather' and aggressions, not only in the spiritual or emotional level as we have said in the two previous coverings, but also ensures us the protection on the material level, against everything that tries to hurt us with violence and to steal what we have conquered with so great effort. This commitment to the Lord ensures us the protection against every accusation and every dart thrown by jealous people against us.

The fact that this covering has not a measure means that **the sacrifice of Jesus and His protection** over our lives have no measure. **His love** for us is immeasurable.

The fourth and last covering placed on the Tabernacle was a covering of **fine leather** (Ex. 25: 5; Ex. 26: 14; Ex. 35: 7; Ex.36: 19; Ex. 39: 34). The bible also says in NIV (Ex. 35: 23): ‘hides of sea cows (namely, dugongs).’ Dugong is sirenian mammal with a tail like a whale’s and the snout like that of a cow (therefore, known as manatee or sea cows), occurring in shallow tropical waters from Eastern Africa to Australia, family ‘Dugongidae’, more commonly present in Indian Ocean in Ancient Times, and nowadays mostly found in the Great Coral Barrier off the coast of Australia and the region of Indonesia. Dugongs have hair on their bodies (at some stage in their lives), and they give birth to live offspring, that is, as they are warm-blooded animals do not lay eggs like fish. Sirenians spend their whole lives in water. Probably the most popular mammal from the Sirenians is the manatee. The name ‘dugong’ comes from the Malay word ‘duyong’ or ‘duyung’ (Etymology: 19th century), which means ‘mermaid.’ Dugongs can reach three meters in length and five hundred kilograms in weight and, unlike manatee, have sharp teeth and therefore can hunt small animals such as lobsters and other crustaceans. The word ‘Sirenia’ came from the word ‘siren.’ ‘Sirens’ are legendary Greek sea beauties, which lured sailors in the sea. It is thought that old-time mermaid sightings were actually Sirenians (the animals), rather than mythical entities, half women, half fish.



Dugongs and Hyacinth

The expression ‘fine leather’ or ‘hides of sea cows’ translated in KJV as ‘badgers skins’, in Hebrew is tahash – תַּחַשׁ (plural: tahashim – תַּחֲשִׁים) or tachash (plural: thchshim), and pronounced as takh’-ash, is probably originated from the Egyptian word, thhs, ‘leather’, and the Arab, tuhasum, ‘dolphin.’ As we saw above, the ‘fine leather’ was mentioned as upper covering for the Tabernacle (Ex. 25: 5; Ex. 26: 14; Ex. 35: 7; Ex. 36: 19; Ex. 39: 34; Ex. 35: 23), and was also a material used to make sandals (Ezek. 16: 10). The Septuagint says hyakinthos, probably with the meaning of ‘skins of hyacinth color’, a color that is difficult to define since the classical authors differ about it. Most species is blue color, although it can be found in white, yellow, pink and blue colors. The modern scholars agree that ‘tahash’ means ‘dolphin.’ Tahash skins were precious in times of the OT (Ezek. 16: 10), and mentioned along with embroidered cloth, fine linen and silk. They were included among the presents given to the construction of the Tabernacle (Ex. 25: 5), along with tanned rams’ skins to cover the Tent of Meeting and the Ark of the Covenant (Num. 4: 6).

The Concordant Version of the Old Testament (CVOT), the transliterated Hebrew, writes the translation of ‘Thchshim (tachash – fine leather)’ as ones-azure, meaning sky blue color or sky blue in color, or else, blue sky. It’s interesting that, when we see the picture of the animal its color is really blue. This was the only covering that could be seen from outside the tent and was impermeable too.

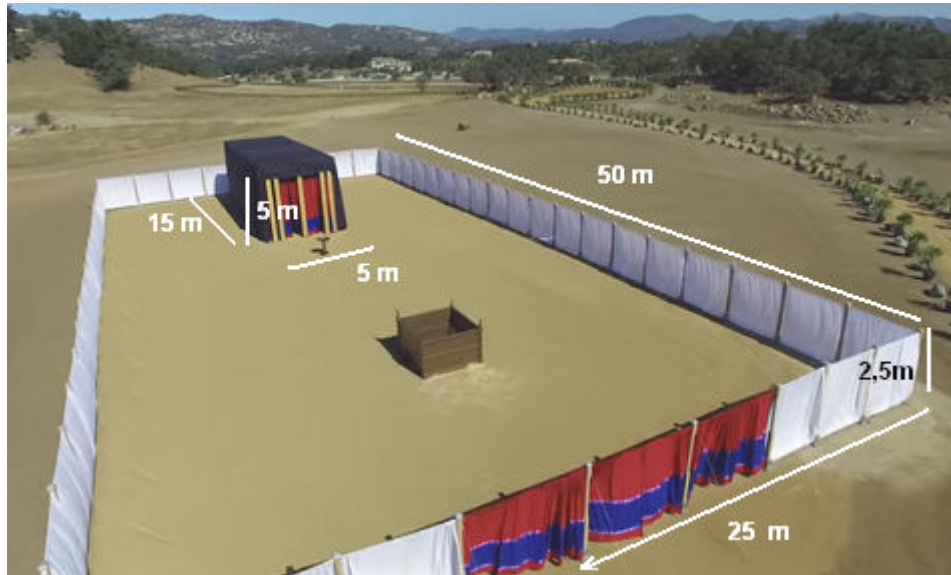
The blue color would confirm **God’s protection over our lives** so that those outside can see it. Actually, our inner temple would be a reflection of heaven. **This 4th covering** symbolizes **the coverage and the blessing of God the Father upon us** when looking at our inner temple and seeing us covered by the blood of His Son (**3rd covering**), the disposition (the willingness) of our soul to surrender to His will and multiply His strength and determination placed by He Himself within us, even though we are powerless beings by nature (**2nd covering**), and the presence of His Spirit in us making us develop His gifts and our sanctification, and following the example of Jesus (**1st covering**). The same comment made to the 3rd covering is applied here, as for the measure of the outer covering of fine leather. This means that the protection, mercy, forgiveness and love of God upon us are without measure.



The Tabernacle and its coverings

The Courtyard – Ex. 27: 9-19; Ex. 38: 9-20

Again, considering the cubit of fifty centimeters in length to facilitate understanding, we will now describe the outer court of the Tabernacle or courtyard around the Tabernacle.



The courtyard around was fifty cubits wide (about twenty-five meters) and one hundred cubits (fifty meters long) – Ex. 27: 9-19; Ex. 38: 9-20. Around it, the curtains were of fine twisted linen (Ex. 27: 9) with two meters and fifty centimeters high and supported by forty pillars of bronze, with bronze bases, hooks and silver bands, distributed in twenty pillars to the south and twenty pillars on the north. On the west side, the curtains were fifty cubits long (twenty-five meters) and ten pillars with bronze bases, hooks and silver bands. The eastern side was fifty cubits long, separated into two parts, with curtains of fifteen cubits long (seven meters and fifty centimeters) to one side, with three pillars and three bases. The other side was equal measure. In the courtyard entrance there was a curtain of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen, with four pillars and four bases of bronze and silver hooks (Ex. 27: 18; Ex. 38: 18-20), and whose measures were twenty cubits long (ten meters) and five cubits high (two meters and fifty centimeters high). In Ex. 38: 19-20, we can also read about it:

“There were four pillars; their four bases were of bronze, their hooks of silver, and the overlaying of their capitals and their bands of silver. All the pegs for the tabernacle and for the court all around were of bronze.” The bible also says (Ex. 27: 17) that all the pillars around the court were connected by silver bands; their hooks were made of silver, and their bases of bronze. All vessels of the tabernacle for the service of priests (Ex.27: 19) were of bronze.



Gold = something very precious, something set apart for God, the Glory of God.

Silver = obedience to God, leading to sanctification; redemption.

Copper = God's trial and judgment over sin.

As it was said previously, linen is a symbol of justice, the justice of God with which He desires His children are also dressed.

Returning to copper (bronze) that we mentioned when talking about the 2nd covering of the tent, this metal is related to **God's judgment on sin**, what implies in repentance on the part of the sinner (The Lord talked to me about this in Psalm 51 when David cries out for His forgiveness after having sinned with Bathsheba), and justice on the part of God.

In most of the time (except in the second covering of the Tabernacle), copper (bronze) was a metal used in outer court of the sanctuary, where the sacrifices were made on behalf of those who had sinned and needed God's forgiveness. Even the priests offered sacrifices for themselves and purified themselves, to then enter the Holy Place and burn incense. For us today, this comment regards in special to those who are still in the world, in sin (out of the linen curtains), and don't know the Lord, and need to repent, receive His forgiveness through Jesus' blood (to pass through the altar of bronze – where the burnt offerings were made – and the bronze basin [NIV – basin for washing]), to then have access to God's heart and let Him made their bodies a living sanctuary for Him (a tabernacle where the Holy Ghost dwells).

When God sent Jesus to Earth, man had already sinned a lot, and had depleted 'the cup of the wrath of God':

Isa. 51: 17: “Rouse yourself, rouse yourself! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl of staggering.”

The wrath of God is His firm, constant, continuous and uncommitted antagonism with sin in all its forms and manifestations:

Rom. 1: 18: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth [NIV: The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness].”

The wrath of God should be propitiated.

God needed to do His justice; and the justice of God is His righteous way to justify the unrighteous through the blood, in this case, the blood of His Son.

Jesus’ death on the cross, paying the price of our sins, delivered us from the devil, canceled our debt and reconciled us to God. In other words, he made justice (freed us from the devil and death), justified us (removed the accusations of sin from us, He acquitted us) and made us righteous in the eyes of God the Father (made us children of God and saints, and therefore, worthy to participate in His kingdom).

Utensils of the Courtyard

The basin for washing (Bronze basin)

Let’s go now to Ex. 38: 8; Ex. 30: 17-21, two texts that talks about the bronze basin [NIV – basin for washing]. The bronze basin was the utensil placed in the courtyard where the priests washed their hands and feet before entering the Tent of Meeting to burn sacred incense, or when they presented the Lord the offerings by fire.



The altar of bronze or the altar of burnt offering

In Ex. 27: 1-8; Ex. 38: 1-7 the bible describes the altar of bronze or the altar of burnt offering, made of acacia wood and overlaid with bronze. It was five cubits long, five cubits wide and three cubits high (using the cubit of 50 cm, it was 2.50 m long, 250 m wide and 1.50 meter high), with horns (raised tips) at each of the four corners, where the animals for the sacrifice were tied. For the sacrifice in the altar of bronze some objects were made, such as: pots to remove the ashes, and its shovels, basins for the blood of the animals, meat forks and firepans, also made of bronze. The bronze grill was like a net and had four rings in its corners, being placed inside the altar and extending halfway down the altar. It also had four rings outside, and through them, two poles of acacia wood overlaid with bronze were inserted, in order to be carried by the Levites.



The holy anointing oil

In Ex. 30: 22-33, the bible talks about the holy anointing oil which could be used only by the priests, both to anoint them for their service and to anoint the Tabernacle and the sacred objects. No other man who was not a priest could be anointed with it. It was composed by five hundred shekels (1 shekel = 11.5 grams) of liquid myrrh (about six kilograms), two hundred and fifty shekels (about three kilograms) of fragrant cinnamon, two hundred and fifty shekels (about three kilograms) of fragrant cane (calamus), five hundred shekels of cassia (about six kilograms), and a hin of olive oil (about four liters).

The olive oil means anointing and God's provision for a purpose.



Myrrh means deliverance, healing, purification, life changing, as was also used to anoint the royal robes of marriage. It was also used as a seductive perfume. It was used to prepare Esther for six months, and after this, more six months with other ointments and perfumes to take her to King Ahasuerus (Est. 2: 12-13). Myrrh is a shrub that grows in desert regions, especially in Africa (native to Somalia and eastern parts of Ethiopia) and the Middle East. It is also the name given to the oily resin of reddish-brown color obtained from the dried sap of this tree (*Commiphora myrrha* or *Balsamodendron myrrha*). The word originates from the Hebrew, maror or murr, which means 'bitter', so

it's bitter and often used in the bible as a synonym for gall or 'poison.' It has the power to numb and anesthetize and take away the pain, so it was offered to Jesus on the cross. In Prov. 31: 6-7 it is written: "Give strong drink to one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more." The strong drink refers to the wine of high alcohol content (*in Hebrew, shekhār*) mixed with myrrh given by Jewish women to the sentenced to cross so that they could withstand the punishment and suffering. In Ps. 69: 21, prophetic psalm of David, there is another reference to the myrrh: "They gave me poison [NIV, gall] for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Jesus refused this relief so that he could suffer everything, totally, for us:

- Matt. 27: 34: "they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it."

- Mk. 15: 23: "And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it."

Cinnamon is the bark of a trunk that is restored every season. It's the same family as the laurel tree and cassia. It means fear of God, ransom, restoration of personal things and not to commit again the same mistakes of the past. The cinnamon is like a bush, coming from the Far East. As it is macerated (peel and seeds) into powder, it is a prophetic picture of the acceptance of Jesus Christ in His death and cross. It represents our approach to Jesus in humility, stripping us of our flesh, making us more like Him, as well as peace and love at home.

Calamus (Greek, Kalamos) means cane, slender reed. The bible also says 'fragrant cane.' It is a root known as Sweet Flag. It only exudes perfume when the root is broken. It was of Calamus (reed) the basket of Moses, when he was placed as a baby in the river Nile. It represents the price that Jesus paid for our redemption, reverence to the Lord, return to the roots, renewal of covenants, humility. It means that we must depend on the Lord as children that need to grow and be taught; that from time to time, we need to renew our covenant of loyalty and commitment with Him. The anointing of calamus also means that we must be 'broken' by God, be worked by Him in our inside so that His essence can be exuded through us.

Cassia means potential, nobility. The essence of cassia, that is also part of the holy anointing oil of the priests, is prepared with the bark of a tree called **Cinnamomum cassia**, of the same family of cinnamon, used for cooking. Cinnamomum cassia is one of the species of the genus Cinnamomum, of the family of Lauraceae, a small plant, similar to a shrub and that reaches up to ten or fifteen meters high. It has perennial leaves of reddish color when young, oblong to lanceolate (as shaped like a lance), somewhat pointed at the end and about ten to fifteen centimeters long. The bark is grayish outwardly, and brown in the interior. Its odor is similar to the cinnamon we usually use in cooking. The flowers are white and small. The fruit are small, fleshy, about one centimeter long, purple in color when ripe. Cinnamomum cassia is known by the names of aromatic cinnamon (odoriferous cinnamon), Chinese cinnamon, Chinese cassia or, simply, cassia. The Cinnamomum cassia species originates in Southeast China and Indochina, but is now widely cultivated in Southeast Asia (India, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam). In ancient Hebrew (the language of the Semite merchants), it was called qetsiah or qtsiy'ah (קציעה). In ancient Greek it was called kasia (κασία). Semitic merchants introduced the product into the Middle East, bringing it from China. The cassia for merchandise is the bark of the tree. Ezek. 27:19 speaks of this spice as part of the trade of Tyre, where it is written in Hebrew the word 'qiddah' – Strong #6916, meaning cassia bark (as in shriveled rolls). The spice is

obtained from the removal of the bark from the tree, and the inner bark is scraped, dried and ground. The buttons are also used as spice.



Cinnamomum cassia – plant



Cassia bark – Cassia lignea

From the bark (which is called **cassia lignea**) the essence of the oil of the holy anointing mentioned in Ex. 30: 24 (qiddah – Strong #6916) was extracted. Cassia lignea is also known by other names like Cinnamomum cassiae cortex, cassiae cortex. In Psalm 45: 8, the word cassia, in Hebrew, is written as qtsiy'ah – Strong #6916: cassia (as peeled), in reference to Cassia lignea, the cortex of Cinnamomum cassia. The word 'cassia' appears three times in the OT (Ex. 30: 24, Ps. 45: 8; Ezek. 27:19), unlike the word 'acacia' (Shittah – Strong #7848), which appears 28 times, often related to the

Tabernacle: Ex. 25: 5; 10; 13; 23; 28; Ex. 26: 15; 26; 32; 37; Ex. 27: 1; 6; Ex. 30: 1; 5; Ex. 35: 7; 24; Ex. 36: 20; 31; 36; Ex. 37: 1; 4; 10; 15; 25; 28; Ex 38: 1; 6; Deut. 10: 3; Isa. 41: 19.

Thus, putting together the meaning of all these essences and the olive oil, we can say that the Lord has anointed us for a special purpose, besides putting inside our being other gifts and abilities like: nobility, love, commitment, and humility, fear of the Lord, His redemption, deliverance, purification and healing so we may be balm and soothe the pains of the afflicted and the hopeless, elevating them to a new level. Furthermore, He always gives us a chance of life changing and not to commit again the same mistakes of the past. It is interesting to note that this kind of oil could only be used by the priests, not by ordinary persons. This makes us think that those who were called by the Lord with more responsibility to perform His work as spiritual leaders of those people needed a far greater anointing, as well as a greater surrender and separation, for it was their example that would keep the ‘flock’ in fidelity and commitment with Him.

The holy incense:

In Ex. 30: 34-38 the bible describes **the holy incense**:

“The Lord said to Moses: Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (an equal part of each), and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy; and you shall beat some of it into powder, and put part of it before the covenant in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you; it shall be for you most holy. When you make incense according to this composition, you shall not make it for yourselves; it shall be regarded by you as holy to the Lord. Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from the people.”

It was composed by sweet spices like stacte, onycha, galbanum with pure frankincense in equal amounts, and seasoned with salt, pure and holy. It was burned on the altar of incense or the golden altar, which was in front of the Ark of the Covenant, outside the curtain, in the Holy Place. This incense was considered holy to the Lord and its only purpose was to be burned to Him, not for priests or for the people to feel its scent (to be used as perfume).

• Ex. 30: 1; 6-9: “You shall make an altar on which to offer incense; you shall make it of acacia wood ... You shall place it in front of the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant, in front of the mercy seat that is over the covenant, where I will meet with you. Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening, he shall offer it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations. You shall not offer unholy incense on it [*not holy, with another type of spices, that’s what it means; or with another type of motivation*], or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; and you shall not pour a drink offering on it.”

Stacte – in Hebrew: nātāph (נָתָף Strong #5198, which can be translated as pitch); and in Greek: staktē. The aromatic gum had a scent that was much appreciated and was extracted through the incision in the branches and stems of the bush *Styrax officinalis* (one among one hundred-thirty species genus *Styrax*), distributed throughout Palestine. *Styrax officinalis* is a deciduous shrub, reaching maximum height of seven meters. It has a simple form, with very thin elliptical leaves from 5 to 10 centimeters long and 3.5–5.5 centimeters wide, alternated and widely spaced on thin and reddish stems, with

a tough and dark bark. A bud, small and light-green, is generally an auxiliary stalk in each leaf. The inflorescence is short and few flowered.

The flowers are very near of the stem, bell shaped and are white and fragrant, about two centimeters long, generally with five or seven petals and many yellow anthers (anther = the part of a stamen that contains the pollen; stamen = male organ of the flower, formed by the fillet that supports the anther). Flowering period extends from spring to summer (May-June). This plant is the source of styrax, a medicinal herb known from ancient times. Some believe it has been the source of extraction of stacte used in the making of the sacred incense.

Seeking revelation from the Lord, He spoke with me about the symbolism of stacte in Ps. 32: 1; 6 (“Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered... Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them”). Thus, stacte symbolizes piety, faithfulness, reverence to the Lord and the humility to recognize our own error to achieve His forgiveness.



Styrax officinalis in Israel

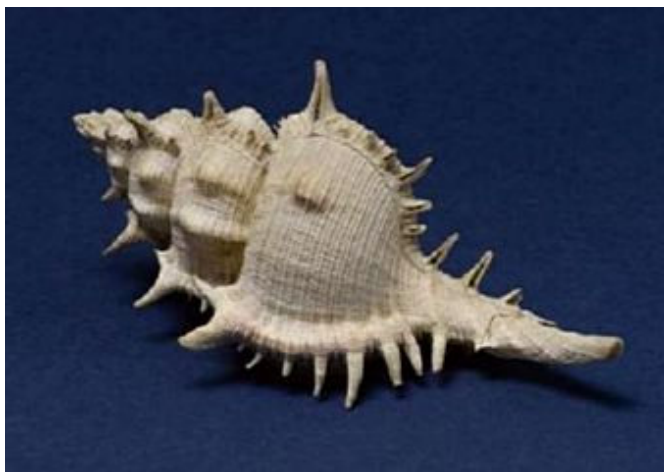


Styrax officinalis – flower and fruit



Stacte – small pieces

Onycha – in Hebrew is sheheleth (שֶׁחֶלֶת) or shecheleth or shachlt (Strong # 7827), which means ‘roaring like a lion’, ‘peeling off by concussion of sound.’ Sh^eh^eleth is related to the Syriac word ‘shehelta’ which can be translated as ‘a tear, distillation, or exudation.’ In Aramaic, the root shchl means ‘to retrieve’, ‘to restore’ (a physical object). The Septuagint used the Greek word ‘onycha’, which means ‘fingernail’, ‘claw.’ The Concordant Version of the Old Testament (CVOT) translates as black-murex-shell. Some researchers think that it comes to the valve shaped like claws that close the openings of the shells of certain mollusks. Other scholars relate the word ‘onycha’ with the precious stone onyx, due to its black and translucent color, or else, with a gum resin of *Styrax* species (onycha benzoin). There are still some researchers trying to relate the onycha to plant ‘bdellium’ and say that bdellium is referred to in the early history of the bible. Bdellium and onyx is the name of a fragrant gum but also a gem or precious stone: “and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there” (Gen. 2: 12).



The murex shell

The resistance on the part of the Jews about the fact of this subject may refer to a mollusk is that they claim to be the mollusk an unclean animal, as it is written in the Torah. But the color purple was not extracted from a mollusk? And what about another shellfish, the chilazon, which according to historical sources supplied the blue color to put on the tallit or in the priestly garments? Summing up all this: what really was ‘onycha’ in Ancient times one cannot say for sure. Based in the translation of

Septuagint, in the meaning of shecheleth, given first, and in the Concordant Version of the Old Testament (CVOT), I think it is more likely that it was a product extracted from the cover, from the scales, from the shell of this mollusk (Black Murex), the same family of the mollusk from which the dye for purple color was extracted, when we described the third covering of the Tabernacle (A covering of tanned rams' skins). After all, what we seek in this text is not theological discussion of what there was 3,000 years ago, but the meaning of this for us today, who live under the dispensation of the Spirit of God.

Seeking revelation from the Lord, He told me about this symbolism in 1 Sam. 14: 36-52 (especially in verses 41-43), when Jonathan, Saul's son, is prevented by the people of being killed by the king himself for disobeying his vow (1 Sam. 14: 24; 27; 28) made to God to give him victory over the Philistines. As Jonathan had not heard the order given by the father to the people, that whoever ate something that day should be killed, even though exhausted from the fight, he ate a honeycomb. But when Saul asked God if he should pursue the Philistines, and the Lord did not answer, the king called the people and questioned if anyone had sinned, and placed himself in front of them with his son Jonathan. Then, he asked God to show him the truth, that is, who had sinned there, and God revealed to him that it was his son who had broken the vow (1 Sam. 14: 41-43). Thus, **onycha symbolizes truth, that is, not to hide inside a shell** when it is necessary for us to appear before the Lord or be His instrument in any situation.

Galbanum – Hebrew: helb^enâ (Strong #2464, חֶלְבָּנָה). In fact, the etymology is uncertain. According to some researchers, galbanum is a fragrant spice, like a gum, originated from two plants with many roots, and evergreen (the adjective in this case, denoting a plant that retains green leaves throughout the year): *Ferula galbaniflua* (Synonym for *Ferula gummosa*) and *Ferula rubricaulis*, native to Persia, but also found in India. There seems to be nine species of *Ferula* found in Palestine. It is an evergreen tree with strong roots. When cutting the stem of the plant, a milky liquid begins to drip. This liquid dries up and hardens quickly and gives origin to a smelly resin, which becomes very penetrating, especially when it is incinerated (it contains sulfur). It is of a light-brown, yellowish or greenish-yellow color, and has a peculiar taste, disagreeable and bitter. It is currently used in medicinal form, and in the preparation of varnishes. On the other hand, the Lexicon Strong's Concordance gives a different etymology: galbanam, which relates to a fragrant gum (as if fatty), perhaps like the fat of animal for the sacrifice. The Concordant Version of the Old Testament (CVOT) writes chlbne, and translates as fat (חֶלְבָּנָה).

It's a bit strange to think that God would choose a smelly resin to be burned along with the sweet spices of the sacred incense. The second or the third hypotheses (Strong and CVOT) have more probability, because they equate more to the guidance given to Moses to burn the fat of animals separately (Lev. 3: 3-4; Lev. 3: 14-16: peace offerings; Lev. 4: 8-9: offer for sins of ignorance of the priests, where only the fat of the bull was burned on the altar of the burnt offering and the rest of the animal was burned outside the camp; Lev. 7: 4-5: guilt offering; Lev. 9: 10: offering for sin of Aaron). The smell of the animal's fat became fragrant in God's nostrils. Thus, based on the very order of God to set apart the fat from the animal to be burned to Him separately in certain sacrifices, we can say that galbanum tells us of separation, of dedication to the Lord.



Ferula galbaniflua and its resin

As to the incense mentioned above, it is about the frankincense, an aromatic resin widely used in perfumery and manufacturing of incense. It is obtained from African and Asian trees (Arabia and India), genus *Boswellia*. Although it was re-introduced in Europe by the Franks its name ‘frankincense’ is derived from the old French ‘franc encens’, which means ‘high quality incense.’ On the other hand, ‘olibanum’ is derived from the Arab: al-lubán (‘the milk’), with reference to the milky juice that drips after the incision in the bark of frankincense tree. In Hebrew, the word used is bownah or lebona or לבונה [לבונה = frankincense or olibanum, according to the Concordant Version of the Old Testament (CVOT)] or lbonah, that, in turn, is derived from laban or laben, as Laban (in Gen. 49: 12), which means white (לָבָן). Thus, it became known as olibanum for its whiteness or because of its white smoke that comes from the combustion of the resin. The sap of the tree dries up and gives rise to the resin. Although the resin is yellow and has bitter and spicy taste, is quite fragrant. In Ex. 30: 7-8, the Lord commanded Aaron to burn the incense in the morning and in the evening, as well as on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16: 12-13).



Galbanum resin and frankincense

Seeking revelation from the Lord, He told me about this symbolism in Neh. 9: 7-8, describing the faithfulness of Abram, believing in His promises and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness (Gen. 15: 6). So the Lord, who is righteous, also fulfilled the

promise given to him, handing his hands the land of the Canaanites. The text says: “You are the Lord, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham; and you found his heart faithful before you, and made with him a covenant to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite; and you have fulfilled your promise, for you are righteous.” When we talked about fine linen and its white color, did we not say that **white color symbolizes justice and holiness?** Well then, **frankincense**, known for its white resin or for its white smoke that comes from the combustion of it, **symbolizes the righteousness of God coming into action and fulfilling His promise** in the lives of those who are faithful to Him and righteous like Abraham.

The bible also says that the incense prepared this way was seasoned with salt. **Salt** [Strong #4417, melah or melach (מֶלַח)] symbolizes **covenant** (Lev. 2: 13; Num. 18: 19), **the fidelity of the promise, non-perishable nature of the covenant, the unchangeable love of God, a sign of purification and holiness.** This confirms what the Lord said to Moses, that incense would be pure and holy, and it would be one more sign from Him that He was willing to make a pact of faithfulness with the people of Israel, a new covenant with His people. Some tribes of the desert rubbed salt on the skin of the newborn child so that it could better bear the heat. So, it also means **protection, strengthening, resistance to adverse conditions.**



As we mentioned above, the incense was related to the priesthood and provoked the wrath of God when it was offered to other gods, or was offered another way than it was commanded to the priests. Therefore, two sons of Aaron were killed by the Lord:

- Lev. 10: 1-7: “Now Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his censer, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered unholy fire before the Lord, such as he had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘This is what the Lord meant when he said’, ‘Through those who are near me I will show myself holy, and before all the people I will be glorified’. And Aaron was silent. Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, ‘Come forward, and carry your kinsmen away from the front of the sanctuary to a place outside the camp.’ They came forward and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had ordered. And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, ‘Do not dishevel your hair, and do not tear your vestments, or you will die and wrath will

strike all the congregation; but your kindred, the whole house of Israel, may mourn the burning that the Lord has sent. You shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for the anointing oil of the Lord is on you.’ And they did as Moses had ordered.”

There are other texts in the Old Testament that mention the incense:

- 2 Chr. 29: 11: “My sons [*king Hezekiah was saying to the Levites and to the priests, by opening the temple again, which had been closed during the reign of his father Ahaz because of the Assyrian yoke*], do not now be negligent, for the Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence to minister to him, and to be his ministers and make offerings to him.”

- Ps. 141: 2 (Psalm of David): “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.”

- Isa. 65: 3: “a people who provoke me to my face continually, sacrificing in gardens and offering incense on bricks.”

- Jer. 44: 8: “Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands, making offerings to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have come to settle? Will you be cut off and become an object of cursing and ridicule among all the nations of the earth?”



In the NT we have more references to incense:

- Rev. 5: 8: “When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”

- Rev. 8: 3-4: “Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer with the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints [*those who are forgiven and sanctified by the blood of Jesus for having accepted the sacrifice of the cross and separated themselves for Him, married or single*], rose before God from the hand of the angel.”

Today, the incense He wants is the prayer of His children.

Bringing this to our lives as Christians, incense is another component of our inner tabernacle, that is, **our prayer to God** every day exalting His name, thanking Him for His help and bringing Him our petitions is pleasant to Him like the scent of spices used in the past.

The bible also tells us of the exact composition of the sweet spices, and that could not be made for any other purpose that was not to be offered to the Lord by the priests, and whoever simply did with the intention of enjoying their aroma, would be cut off from the people. This means that we, as kings and priests who received the mercy of God (1 Pet. 2: 9-10), we must understand that in our prayers some 'ingredients' are necessary:

- **Piety, faithfulness, reverence** to the Lord and the **humility** to recognize our own error to achieve His **forgiveness** – stacte.

- to be true in our way of doing things and to always seek to know His **truth**, not hiding behind lies or fantasies or fables. This not only regards our prayer but also our positioning as prophets, releasing a word of truth coming from God's mouth for correction, comfort or teaching of His people – onycha.

- **Dedication to the Lord** and our **separation** from the things of the flesh and the world so that we can walk as real God's children on earth, pure and holy, likewise the fat was separated from the meat and the skin of the animal which was slain. By praying, God's word should come out of our mouths like a sword, dividing soul from spirit, joints from marrow, as the bible says (Heb. 4: 12), i.e., it is the word of God that acts in the spiritual world, undoing what is hidden and bringing to light the revelation from the Lord – galbanum.

- To be faithful to the Lord and believe in His promises, so that His justice may come into action, materializing them in our lives – frankincense.

- To be aware of what He did to us when He called us to be His, i.e., **covenant, fidelity** of the promise, **non-perishable pact**, the **unchangeable love** of God, a sign of **purification and holiness** – salt.

Whoever made any incense like this simply with the intention to enjoy its aroma would be cut off from the people. In other words, who does not want to behave the holy way of God, who doesn't take Him seriously and mocks or doesn't value Him and His things doesn't have the right to enjoy His blessings or the intimacy with His Spirit.

Finally, we can understand what Paul wrote in the Epistle to the Corinthians: we are the aroma of Christ to those who believe:

- 2 Cor. 2: 14-17: "But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not peddlers of God's word like so many; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence."

The utensils of the Tabernacle (the sanctuary)

After having described the measure of the courtyard and its utensils with their meaning, let's return once more to the sanctuary itself, the Tent of Meeting, in order to describe the furnishings and the utensils present inside it.

There were interior pillars (which supported the curtain between the 'Holy of Holies' and the 'Holy Place'), and the external pillars, at the entrance of the tent. They were different in number: four pillars for the interior and five for the entrance of the tent. The text can be found in Ex. 26: 31-32; 36-37. It says: "You shall make a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, which have hooks of gold and rest on four bases of silver... You shall make a

screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework. 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.”

So, we can understand that there was a separation inside the tent, namely, two enclosures. One of them stayed behind the inner curtain supported by four pillars of acacia wood covered with gold and placed on silver bases. The other enclosure stayed between this curtain and the entrance of the tent, where there was also a curtain of the same material, but supported by five pillars of acacia wood covered with gold and on bronze bases. The first enclosure was called Holy of Holies, and it was there that the Ark of the Covenant had been placed. The second enclosure was called the Holy Place, and in it there were: the altar of incense or **golden altar**, the **table with the bread of the Presence** or the shewbread (to the north), and the **golden lampstand** (to the south). The altar of incense, although placed in front of the Ark, out of the curtain in the Holy Place, was considered a part of the Holy of Holies (Heb. 9: 1-10). The first curtain symbolized the separation between the holy and the profane, between God and men. It was the curtain that was torn when Jesus died on the cross symbolizing that His death was breaking the separation between God and us. From that moment, as high priest He was making the ultimate sacrifice to give us free access to the heart of the Father (Heb. 9: 11-12; Heb. 10: 19-23; Heb. 4: 14-16).



In the **Holy Place** the priests entered every day to serve the Lord, twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, Aaron and his sons.

- Ex. 30: 1; 6-9: “You shall make an altar on which to offer incense; you shall make it of acacia wood ... You shall place it in front of the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant, in front of the mercy seat that is over the covenant, where I will meet with you. Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it, and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening, he shall offer it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations. You shall not offer unholy incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; and you shall not pour a drink offering on it.”

In the **Holy of Holies** only the high priest could enter, once a year (on the Day of Atonement): Lev. 16: 2; 14-16; 18-19; 30; 33; 34; Heb. 9: 7; 12; 25. As our high priest, Jesus, by dying on the cross made this ultimate atonement for us, opening to us the way to the throne of God.

The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant was a box, built of acacia wood with 2 ½ cubits long, 1 ½ cubits wide and 1 ½ cubits high (more or less 1.20 m x 80 cm x 80 cm). **It was the symbol of God's presence with men, His Covenant with us.**

Inside the Ark, the Lord commanded Moses to put the tablets of the Law, which symbolized the pact that He was doing with His people.

In Heb. 9: 2-5a, when the writer talks about the ancient Tabernacle he comments about the ark: "For a tent was constructed, the first one, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the Presence; this is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a tent called the Holy of Holies? In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded (Num. 17: 8-10), and the tablets of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat." And in Ex. 16: 33-34 it is written: "And Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations'. As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the covenant [NVI, Testimony, i.e., the tablets of the Law], for safekeeping."



A golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod were not actually inside the ark, but beside it "place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout your generations"... so Aaron placed it before the covenant, for safekeeping."

- 2 Chr. 5: 10: "There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets that Moses put there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the people of Israel after they came out of Egypt."

- 1 Kin. 8: 9: "There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites, when they came out of the land of Egypt."

When Solomon built the temple, the urn with manna and Aaron's rod were already gone.

This means that:

Within our being He put **His laws** ('tablets' – cf. 2 Cor. 3: 2-3: "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; 3 and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts"), **His food** ('manna'), which is His word to sustain us, and **His anointing and authority** as kings and priests (Aaron's rod that flourished).

The table for the bread of the Presence

The table for the bread of the Presence is described in Ex. 25: 23-30; Ex. 37: 10-16. Its measures were: 2 cubits long, 1 cubit wide and a 1 ½ cubit high (1 meter long, 50 centimeters wide and 75 centimeters high). On the table the priests put the bread of the Presence in number of twelve; one for each tribe of Israel. They were changed every Saturday, and only Aaron and his sons could eat them (Lev. 24: 5-9). The table meant **communion and intimacy with God**, and the bread, **the food and divine provision**.

The lampstand of gold

The lampstand of gold is described in Ex. 25: 31-40; Ex. 37: 17-24; Num. 8: 1-4; Heb. 9: 2, and its base and the shaft were made of hammered gold. There were six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side and three branches out of the other side of it. Its weight was of one talent, i.e., thirty-four kilograms. Aaron and his sons took care of it so the lamps were kept lit continually before the Lord; that's why there was pure oil of beaten olives for the lamps, instead of pressed by a stone, as it was custom to do, in order to extract the oil (Lev. 24: 1-4; Ex. 27: 20-21). The lampstand means **the presence of the Holy Spirit** with us, God's light, a life style that should be part of the way of living of every Christian.

The altar of incense or golden altar

As we said previously, the altar of incense or golden altar, although placed in front of the Ark, out of the curtain in the Holy Place, was considered a part of the Holy of Holies (Heb. 9: 1-10). It was made of acacia wood covered with gold, and its measures were: 1 cubit long, 1 cubit wide and 2 cubits high (50 centimeters long, 50 centimeters wide and 1 meter high – Ex. 30: 1-10; Ex. 37: 25-28). It also had four horns (raised tips) on its corners, and on its sides there were four rings that held two poles, by which it was carried by the Levites.

The golden altar is **a life style of prayer and the brightness of the Lord** (gold) in our lives, as a good habit that should be cultivated so that our soul and our spirit are in tune with God's word, i.e., with the Lord's thoughts for us, and thus, we can reflect His brightness and His truth.



Full meaning of the Tabernacle

The Tabernacle constructed this way has a resemblance to our being and our life. The **Outer Court (courtyard)** represents our social relationships in which many people see us, greet us, but know little about us. The **Holy Place** is our soul, in which participate the closest people as our family and friends who know us better and know what goes on in our hearts. In the **Holy of Holies**, which corresponds to our spirit, where are the inmost of our desires and our true self, only the Spirit of God has access.

When Jesus came, He fulfilled the role of the true high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5: 5-6), set the example of how to be the Tabernacle of God on earth, He taught us the importance of the separation from the mundane things so we can remain always covered by His blood and beneath His blessing and His approval. He also taught us to do our sacrifice, that is, to carry our cross, to overcome our challenges and be able to be an example for those who still do not know Him. They need to learn it is through the sincere repentance, and submitting to His judgment that they will know His justice and the meaning of the true priesthood, which He has already determined for all His children, giving them the right to draw near Him whenever they need, with no impediment. In Heb. 4: 14-16 it is written: “Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Time to build the Tabernacle

The Israelites took one year to build the Tabernacle, according to the plan that was given to Moses on the top of Sinai. This was the time they stayed camped at the foot of

the Holy Mountain. In Ex. 19: 1-2 the bible says: “On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain.”

They spent **a three months journey from Egypt to the Sinai.**

- Ex. 40: 2; 17; 34-35: “Set up the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the first month... So the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year (NIV)... Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.”

- Num. 9: 1-5: “The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: Let the Israelites keep the passover at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time; according to all its statutes and all its regulations you shall keep it. So Moses told the Israelites that they should keep the passover. They kept the passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, in the wilderness of Sinai. Just as the Lord had commanded Moses, so the Israelites did.”

The Tabernacle was set up **on the first day of the first month in the second year.** And on the **fourteenth day** of this very month, **they celebrated Passover**; the second Passover in their lives, for the first Passover had been celebrated in Egypt, before they get out of there.

- Num. 1: 1-2: “The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: Take a census of the whole congregation of Israelites, in their clans, by ancestral houses, according to the number of names, every male individually.”

- Num. 2: 1-2: “The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: The Israelites shall camp each in their respective regiments, under ensigns by their ancestral houses; they shall camp facing the tent of meeting on every side.”

On the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, with the Tabernacle already built, the Lord told Moses to take a **census** of the whole congregation of Israelites. God showed how He would like His children to camp around the Tent.

In other words:

In the first month the tabernacle was set up, and in the second month the census was done. Then, the Lord showed them how they should camp from that day on. That’s why the first tent where God spoke to Moses was pitched outside the camp, so that away from the people he could talk to God in holiness. This is the same to say: so that away from sin, he could enter the presence of God in holiness. Who wanted to seek the Lord, got out the camp and went to the tent, which came to be called the tent of meeting, or tabernacle of the congregation:

- Ex. 33: 7-11: “Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each of them, at the entrance of their tents and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and bow down, all of them, at the entrance

of their tent. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then he would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent.”

Now:

- Num. 10: 11-13: “**In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day** of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle of the covenant. Then the Israelites **set out by stages** from the wilderness of Sinai, and the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran. They set out for the first time at the command of the Lord by Moses.”

- Num. 10: 33-36: “So they set out from the mount of the Lord three days’ journey with the ark of the covenant of the Lord going before them three days’ journey, to seek out a resting place for them, the cloud of the Lord being over them by day when they set out from the camp. Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, ‘Arise, O Lord, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you’. And whenever it came to rest, he would say, ‘Return, O Lord of the ten thousand thousands of Israel.’”

- Num. 9: 15-23: “On the day the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant; and from evening until morning it was over the tabernacle, having the appearance of fire. It was always so: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night. Whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, then the Israelites would set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the Israelites would camp. At the command of the Lord the Israelites would set out, and at the command of the Lord they would camp. As long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they would remain in camp. Even when the cloud continued over the tabernacle many days, the Israelites would keep the charge of the Lord, and would not set out. Sometimes the cloud would remain a few days over the tabernacle, and according to the command of the Lord they would remain in camp; then according to the command of the Lord they would set out. Sometimes the cloud would remain from evening until morning; and when the cloud lifted in the morning, they would set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud lifted they would set out. Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, resting upon it, the Israelites would remain in camp and would not set out; but when it lifted they would set out. At the command of the Lord they would camp, and at the command of the Lord they would set out. They kept the charge of the Lord, at the command of the Lord by Moses.”

- Ex. 40: 36-38: “Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.”

In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day, after the census, the cloud lifted from over the Tabernacle of the covenant for the first time, and the children of Israel began their pilgrimage through the wilderness, for forty years; more precisely, thirty-eight years and nine months, after the punishment determined by God for the rebels, for they walked three months from Egypt to Sinai and spent a year camped at the foot of that mountain.

Conclusion:

We can summarize everything we read in few words: we are now the Tabernacle of God, with His Spirit of life within our being, helping us to cross the deserts and conquer

the promises of the Lord for us. Through the overcoming our trials and challenges, and the practice of Jesus' word, we sanctify ourselves until our definite dwelling in the New Jerusalem. We no longer need special places or sacrifices to speak with Him, but of a repentant and contrite heart that rejoices in the simplicity of the gospel that Jesus left us as an inheritance.

Now, look at the picture carefully, meditate and repeat to yourself: "I AM THE TABERNACLE OF GOD ON EARTH."



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