

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS CHAPTER 26

Moses here receives instructions,

I. Concerning the inner curtains of the tent or tabernacle, and the coupling of those curtains, **#Ex 26:1-6**.

II. Concerning the outer curtains which were of goats' hair, to strengthen the former, **#Ex 26:7-13**.

III. Concerning the case or cover which was to secure it from the weather, **#Ex 26:14**.

IV. Concerning the boards which were to be reared up to support the curtains, with their bars and sockets, **#Ex 26:15-30**.

V. The partition between the holy place and the most holy, **#Ex 26:31-35**.

VI. The veil for the door, **#Ex 26:36-37**.

These particulars, thus largely recorded, seem of little use to us now; yet, having been of great use to Moses and Israel, and God having thought fit to preserve down to us the remembrance of them, we ought not to overlook them. Even the antiquity renders this account venerable.

Ver. 1.

I. The house must be a *tabernacle* or *tent*, such as soldiers now use in the camp, which was both a mean dwelling and a movable one; and yet the ark of God had not better, till Solomon built the temple 480 years after this, **#1Ki 6:1**. God manifested his presence among them thus in a tabernacle,

1. In compliance with their present condition in the wilderness, that they might have him with them wherever they went. Note, God suits the tokens of his favour, and the gifts of his grace, to his people's wants and necessities, according as they are, accommodating his mercy to their state, prosperous or adverse, settled or unsettled. *When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, #Isa 43:2.*

2. That it might represent the state of God's church in this world, it is a *tabernacle-state*, **#Ps 15:1**. *We have here no continuing city;* being strangers in this world, and travellers towards a better, we shall never be fixed till we come to heaven. Church-privileges are movable goods, from one place to another; the gospel is not tied to any place; the candlestick is in a tent, and may easily be taken away, **#Re 2:5**. If we make much of the tabernacle, and improve the privilege of it, wherever we go it will accompany us; but, if we neglect and disgrace it, wherever we stay it will forsake us. *What hath my beloved to do in my house? #Jer 11:15.*

II. The curtains of the tabernacle must correspond to a divine pattern.

1. They were to be very rich, the best of the kind, *fine twined linen;* and colours very pleasing, *blue,* and *purple,* and *scarlet.*

2. They were to be embroidered with cherubim (**#Ex 26:1**), to intimate that the angels of God pitch their tents round about the church, **#Ps 34:7**. As there were cherubim over the mercy-seat, so there were round the tabernacle; for we find the angels

compassing, not only the throne, but the elders; #Re 5:11.

3. There were to be two hangings, five breadths in each, sewed together, and the two hangings coupled together with golden clasps, or tacks, so that it might be all one tabernacle, #Ex 26:6. Thus the churches of Christ and the saints, though they are many, are yet one, being *fitly joined together* in holy love, and by the *unity of the Spirit*, so growing into one *holy temple in the Lord*, #Eph 2:21-22; 4:16. This tabernacle was very strait and narrow; but, at the preaching of the gospel, the church is bidden to *enlarge the place of her tent*, and to *stretch forth her curtains*, #Isa 54:2.

Ver. 7.

Moses is here ordered to make a double covering for the tabernacle, that it might not rain in, and that the beauty of those fine curtains might not be damaged.

1. There was to be a covering of hair camlet curtains, which were somewhat larger every way than the inner curtains, because they were to enclose them, and probably were stretched out at some little distance from them, #Ex 26:7, &c. These were coupled together with brass clasps. The stuff being less valuable, the tacks were so; but the brass tacks would answer the intention as effectually as the golden ones. The bonds of unity may be as strong between curtains of goats' hair as between those of purple and scarlet.
2. Over this there was to be another covering, and that a double one (#Ex 26:14), one of *rams' skins dyed red*, probably dressed with the wool on; another of *badgers' skins*, so we translate it, but it should rather seem to have been some strong sort of leather (but very fine), for we read of the best sort of shoes being made of it, #Eze 16:10. Now observe here,

(1.) That the outside of the tabernacle was coarse and rough, the beauty of it was in the inner curtains. Those in whom God dwells must labour to be better than they seem to be. Hypocrites put the best side outwards, like *whited sepulchres*; but *the king's daughter is all glorious within* (#Ps 45:13); in the eye of the world black as the tents of Kedar, but, in the eye of God, comely as the curtains of Solomon, #So 1:5. Let our adorning be that of the hidden man of the heart, which God values, #1Pe 3:4.

(2.) That where God places his glory he will create a defence upon it; even upon the habitations of the righteous there shall be a covert, #Isa 6:5-6. The protection of Providence shall always be upon the beauty of holiness. God's tent will be a pavilion, #Ps 27:5.

Ver. 15.

Very particular directions are here given about the boards of the tabernacle, which were to bear up the curtains, as the stakes of a tent which had need to be strong, #Isa 54:2. These boards had tenons which fell into the mortises that were made for them in silver bases. God took care to have every thing strong, as well as fine, in his tabernacle. Curtains without boards would have been shaken by every wind; but *it is a good thing* to have the *heart established with grace*, which is as the boards to support the curtains of profession, which otherwise will not hold out long. The boards were coupled together with gold rings at top and bottom (#Ex 26:24), and kept firm with bars that ran through golden staples in every board (#Ex 26:26), and the boards and bars were all richly gilded, #Ex 26:29. Thus every thing in the tabernacle was very splendid, agreeable to that infant state of the church, when such things were proper enough to please children, to possess the minds of

the worshippers with a reverence of the divine glory, and to affect them with the greatness of that prince who said, *Here will I dwell*; in allusion to this the new Jerusalem is said to be of *pure gold*, #Re 21:18. But the builders of the gospel church said, *Silver and gold have we none*; and yet the glory of their building far exceeded that of the tabernacle, #2Co 3:10-11. *How much better is wisdom than gold!* No orders are given here about the floor of the tabernacle; probably that also was boarded; for we cannot think that within all these fine curtains they trod upon the cold or wet ground; if it was so left, it may remind us of #Ex 20:24, *An altar of earth shalt thou make unto me.*

Ver. 31.

Two veils are here ordered to be made,

1. One for a partition between the holy place and the most holy, which not only forbade any to enter, but forbade them so much as to look into the holiest of all, #Ex 26:31,33. Under that dispensation, divine grace was veiled, but now we behold it with open face, #2Co 3:18. The apostle tells us (#Heb 9:8-9) what was the meaning of this veil; it intimated that the ceremonial law *could not make the comers thereunto perfect*, nor would the observance of it bring men to heaven; the *way into the holiest of all was not made manifest while the first tabernacle was standing*; life and immortality lay concealed till they were *brought to light by the gospel*, which was therefore signified by the rending of this veil at the death of Christ, #Mt 27:51. We have not *boldness to enter into the holiest*, in all acts of devotion, *by the blood of Jesus*, yet such as obliges us to a holy reverence and a humble sense of our distance.
2. Another veil was for the outer door of the tabernacle, #Ex 26:36-37. Through this first veil the priests went in every day to minister in the holy place, but not the people, #Heb 9:6. This veil, which was all the defence the tabernacle had against thieves and robbers, might easily be broken through, for it could be neither locked nor barred, and the abundance of wealth in the tabernacle, one would think, might be a temptation; but by leaving it thus exposed,

(1.) The priests and Levites would be so much the more obliged to keep a strict watch upon it, and,

(2.) God would show his care of his church on earth, though it is weak and defenceless, and continually exposed. A curtain shall be (if God please to make it so) as strong a defence to his house as gates of brass and bars of iron.