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MINISTRIES

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The Tabernacle: Curtains and Unity

The tabernacle in the wilderness was God’s dwelling place among the Israelites after he freed them from slavery in Egypt. It can be a chore to read through the passages that describe the tabernacle, but it turns out that the tabernacle is full of symbolism and spiritual lessons that teach us about our relationship with God. For a quick introduction to what the tabernacle was, we recommend watching our teaching, *The Tabernacle: An Introduction*. In this teaching, we’re going to take a close look at one particular part of the tabernacle: the curtained walls. Let’s get started.

The tabernacle had a wooden frame which provided its structural strength, much like a modern house does. Unlike a modern house, the tabernacle’s frame was made of wood planks overlaid with gold. Draped over these golden boards were ten multicolored curtains. These curtains are described in the beginning of Exodus 26:

Exodus 26:1-6

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

Here we have ten curtains, made of numerous colored fabrics and bearing pictures of cherubim. These curtains are representative of the entire tabernacle. When these curtains are joined together, the tabernacle itself is said to be a “single whole,” or in Hebrew, *echad*, which means, “one.”

What do these curtains represent? Well, we know that the tabernacle as a whole represents God’s

people:

Ephesians 2:19-22

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua] himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:16

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

The word “you” in these verses is plural, meaning that it is referring not just to one person, but to the entire congregation. God’s people as a group are a holy temple, a dwelling place for God’s spirit. If the tabernacle represents God’s people, and the curtains represent the tabernacle, then the curtains must also represent God’s people. So, what lessons can we learn from this symbology? What is the significance of the tabernacle curtains representing us? Well, first of all, the curtains were meant to be joined together, to be *one*. The curtains being one is what made the tabernacle a functioning whole. Like the curtains, we should be joined together to be one.

Psalm 133:1

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

Jesus, or Yeshua as he was called in Hebrew, prayed in Gethsemane shortly before he was arrested to be crucified. Yeshua’s foremost concern in this prayer was that his disciples would be one. In this prayer, he uses tabernacle terminology: words like “sanctify,” “consecrate,” and “glory.” Just like the tabernacle was supposed to be “one,” Yeshua wants us to be “one”:

John 17:17-23

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

What does it mean for us to be “one”? In short, it means to value the unity of God’s people, and to be willing to put up with each other for the sake of being together. It means to make amends for the sins we commit against each other; to seek forgiveness when we have wronged others, and to give forgiveness to those who have wronged us. Yeshua says that this is so important that we should address this issue before we even try to approach God’s altar:

Matthew 5:23-24

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

In addition to forgiving each other, being in unity also means we should highly value having God's people together, and we should do our best to put up with each other. We should love each other.

Colossians 3:12-14

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Ephesians 4:1-6

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Since the oneness of God's people is so valuable, this also means that we should avoid things that will tear God's people apart. We should not seek to detach the tabernacle curtains from each other, to do things that separate God's people, or worse, pit them against one another:

Proverbs 6:16-19

There are six things that the LORD [YHWH] hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and **one who sows discord among brothers.**

Sowing discord among brothers is abominable, and we should avoid it at all costs. This does not mean that we should avoid all controversy; some conflict between brothers is inevitable, and some conflict is even necessary. But we should carefully weigh the value of having conflict with our brothers in Christ. While some things are worth fighting about, are we fighting and separating over issues that are less important than the issue of unity? Paul warns about this in his instructions to Timothy:

1 Timothy 1:3-7

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

If we are going to teach or contend over things that can separate people, we need to thoroughly understand what we are saying and why it is important. It is not worthwhile to divide God's people over myths and speculations; in fact, that is abominable. If we are God's tabernacle, then part of our responsibility is to hold together to form a single structure. As much as we can, we should strive to do so.

Romans 12:18

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Besides them being joined together, another significant feature of the curtains was that they had “designs of cherubim” woven into them. What is the significance of this? Well, in the Scriptures, cherubim are protectors:

Genesis 3:24

He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

After man sinned, God drove him out of the garden and stationed cherubim to protect the way to life. Since the curtains represent us, the designs of cherubim woven into them could symbolize that God is protecting us. We know that God is the protector of his people:

Deuteronomy 32:9-10

But the LORD's [YHWH] portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.

Isaiah 31:4-5

For thus the LORD [YHWH] said to me, “As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey, and when a band of shepherds is called out against him he is not terrified by their shouting or daunted at their noise, so the LORD [YHWH] of hosts will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill. Like birds hovering, so the LORD [YHWH] of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it; he will spare and rescue it.”

We could also interpret these cherubim designs to mean that we, as God’s people, have a responsibility to act like cherubim and protect the way to life. How would we do that? One way is by keeping sin out of the congregation. Sin leads to death, so it cannot be part of the way to life. If we are on the path to life, we must learn to stop sinning.

Romans 6:13

Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

1 John 5:18

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

In addition to keeping our own sins out of the congregation, we can also protect the way to life by removing the sins of other people. This is not to say that we personally remove those sins, but rather that we bring our brothers’ sins to their attention, to give them a chance to repent. If they do repent, then they will be on the path to life again, and their sin will be removed from the congregation.

Hebrews 3:12-13

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Galatians 6:1-2

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Matthew 18:15

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

Unfortunately, if a brother is confronted about his sin and he does not repent, but he persists in his sin, then he will be removed from the congregation.

Matthew 18:16-17

But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Those who know the truth, but continue to sin and refuse to repent, cannot be allowed to stay. Sin simply does not belong on the way to life. Many other scriptures reinforce this point. Here are just a few:

1 Corinthians 5:9-13

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

2 John 9-11

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.

Like the cherubim, we must keep sin out of God's dwelling place; that is to say, we must keep sin out of God's people.

We've talked about the curtains' unity and their cherubim designs, and now the final symbolic feature we will cover is the fabric the curtains were made of. The curtains were made of “fine twined linen and blue and purple and scarlet yarns” (Exodus 26:1). These are the same cloths that were used in the clothing of the priests:

Exodus 28:4-5

These are the garments that they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a coat of checker work, a turban, and a sash. They shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons to serve me as priests. They shall receive gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen.

If we are the tabernacle curtains, then we are “dressed” in the same kinds of cloth as the priests. Just like the priests’ job was to minister to God’s people, our job is to minister to each other. This ministry can take many forms, from prophesying and teaching to generously serving each other and showing hospitality. All of these are acts of ministry, and ultimately are expressions of love:

Romans 12:4-8

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

1 Peter 4:8-11

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ [Messiah Yeshua]...

Matthew 20:25-28

But Jesus [Yeshua] called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

As God’s people, we should be serving others and giving our lives for them. The priests who served at the tabernacle were dressed and equipped to do just that. They were designated as people of service. If we have God’s spirit in us, then we are also “dressed” and equipped to do the same. As the tabernacle curtains, we are “clothed” like priests, and our job is to love and minister.

In conclusion, the tabernacle curtains represent us. The curtains joining together as one symbolizes the unity we should have as God’s people. The design of cherubim on the curtains symbolizes both how God protects us, and how we should protect his congregation from sin. And the materials the curtains are made of symbolizes the ministry and service we should provide for each other. This unity, protection, and service symbolized in the curtains is what we should exemplify as God’s people.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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