

Separating the Most Holy from the Holy: The 'Veil' in the Tabernacle and First & Second Temples

Tim Hegg • TorahResource.com

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the extant data, both biblical and extra-biblical, to determine as far as possible the manner in which the Most Holy Place is separated from the Holy Place in the Tabernacle (*mishkan*) and subsequent Temples (*heichal*). Such a determination is valuable not only for the interpretation of the biblical texts which directly describe the physical characteristics of the *mishkan* and *heichalot*, but also for an understanding of the application as applied to the work of Yeshua, especially in the Apostolic Scriptures.

Terminology of the Mishkan

The terminology of the Tanakh in designating the inner room of the *mishkan* is usually קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים, *kodesh hakodashim*, “the holy of holies.”¹ The similar term, קֹדֶשׁ קְדוֹשִׁים, *kodesh kodeshim*, “holy of holies” (without the article) is used of holy objects (altar, offerings, incense, anointing oil, priestly garments, etc.).²

The grammatical construction of a noun followed by its plural is idiomatic in the Hebrew for indicating a comparative superlative.³ Other examples are: שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים, “song of songs” (= “most excellent song”), and שָׁמַיִם הַשָּׁמַיִם, “heaven of heavens” (= “highest heaven”). Thus, קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים means “most holy” as compared to הַקֹּדֶשׁ, the Holy Place.

Two texts, however, which have *kodesh kodeshim* (without the article) are understood by some to refer to the inner sanctuary of the Tabernacle/Temple, the holy of holies: Ezekiel 45:3 and Daniel 9:24. In Ezekiel 45:3, the term “holy of holies” may just as well be translated “most holy” (as it usually is translated) and refer to the whole Temple complex. This leaves Daniel 9:24 as the only other place in the Tanakh where *kodesh kodeshim* (without the article) is regularly translated as “holy place” or “holy of holies.” Without any other clear example of *kodesh kodeshim* meaning “the holy place,” we should probably understand Daniel 9:24 as referring not specifically to the Most Holy Place but to the Temple as a whole (parallel to its use in Ezekiel 45:3).

A second phrase used in the Tanakh to designate the inner sanctuary is מִבֵּית לְפָרֹכֶת, *mibeit laparochet*, “inside the veil.”⁴ The veil or *parochet* was woven of blue, purple, and scarlet material along with fine twisted linen and embroidered with cherubim. It was hung from golden clasps, separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place of the *mishkan*.

A third designation is the word דְּבַר, *d'vir*, sometimes used in connection with בַּיִת but often used alone. Its derivation may be from the common verb דָּבַר, “to speak” and may refer to the Most Holy Place as the locus of HaShem's revelation to Israel.

Rabbinic Hebrew uses the common קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים, *kodesh hakodashim*, to designate the inner sanctuary of the Tabernacle or Temple.⁵

¹ Ex 26:33; 1Kin 6:16; 7:50; 8:6; Ezek 41:4; 1Chr 6:49; 2Chr 3:10; 4:22; 5:7.

² Ex 29:37; 30:10, 29, 36; 40:10; Lev 2:3, 10; 6:17[10], 25[18], 29[22]; 7:1, 6; 10:12, 17; 14:13; 24:9; 27:28; Num 18:9; Eze 43:12; 48:12; 1Chr 23:13.

³ Bruce Walke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 269f.

⁴ Lev 16:2, 12, 15; 18:7.

⁵ Jastrow lists קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים, *qad'shei haqodashim*, as also used in rabbinic literature to designate “...the westernmost compartment of the Temple,” (ad. loc., קֹדֶשׁ, p. 1324), but this is disputed. Most often, this designation denotes “most holy things.”

Physical Description of the Mishkan [Exodus 26 and 36]

The Tabernacle itself was constructed of beams or planks (הַקְרָשִׁים *haq^rrashim*) 10 cubits⁶ tall and 1.5 cubits wide, each with two tenons at the base, and overlaid with gold.⁷ Silver sockets (אֲדָנֵי-חֶסֶפֶת, *'adnei-cheseph*), each weighing a talent [150 lbs.] received the tenons and formed a continuous base for the joined walls. The dimension of the silver bases may be deduced from the overall dimensions of the *mishkan*. Since 40 bases suffice for 20 boards,⁸ their width must have been 3/4 of a cubit. We may assume their thickness to be that of the boards. Their height is not given. Rashi and others suggest they were one cubit high and that the tenons on the bottom of the boards were likewise one cubit in length so that when inserted in the socket the overall height of the *mishkan* was 10 cubits. This is the standard interpretation among the Sages⁹ (see Fig. 2, p. 17).

Exodus 26:24 is understood by some of the Sages to detail a square ring which joined each board to its neighbor via grooves at the top of each¹⁰ (see Fig. 1, p. 17). Additionally, poles held by golden rings on the outside of the walls gave stability and joined the individual boards together as one.¹¹

Twenty boards joined together formed the south wall and twenty likewise made the northern wall. The west end was made of six boards plus the two corner boards for a total of eight. If the thickness of the boards was one cubit, the two corner boards differed not in dimension, but in placement, for they would have been flush with the six boards which formed the western wall, but would have overlapped the thickness of the adjoining southern and northern walls. The two corner boards also differ in the placement of the grooves cut at the top to receive the square joining ring (see Fig. 1, p. 17).

The boards were to be set flush, side-to-side,¹² meaning the length of the structure was 30 cubits (20 X 1.5). If the western wall (the enclosed end) of the *mishkan* is as suggested above, the inner width of the structure was 10 cubits (.5 + [6 X 1.5] + .5).¹³

The *mishkan* was divided by a woven curtain called הַפָּרֹכֶת, *haparochet*, “the veil.” It was made of blue

⁶ The royal cubit, which most scholars feel best fits the descriptions in the Solomonic Temple, was most likely the unit used for measuring the Tabernacle as well. It measured 20.9 inches [cf. “Temple, Jerusalem” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday, 1992), 6.357.] In the Talmud, אַמָּה, “cubit” has several different uses. The standard cubit (אַמָּה בַּיּוֹנִים), “standard cubit” measured 18.9 inches according to the Na'eh scale, and 22.7 inches according to the Chazon Ish scale. The “short cubit” (אַמָּה קְטַנָּה or אַמָּה בֵּת הַמִּישָׁה) is approximately 15.3 inches long. (cf. Adin Steinsaltz, *The Talmud: A Reference Guide* (Random House, 1989), p. 283.

⁷ Ex 26:15f., 29.

⁸ Ex 26:19.

⁹ Cf. Steinberg, *The Mishkan and the Holy Garments* (Toras Chaim, 5752), pp. 68-9.

¹⁰ *Beraita d'Melechet HaMishkan*, cited from Steinberg, Op. cit., p. 72.

¹¹ Ex 26:29.

¹² Ex 26:24, וַיְהִי מִלְמַטָּה, literally, “and they shall be from-to beneath ...,” meaning “from one edge to the next edge.”

¹³ Josephus (*Antiquities*, 3:6:3) seems to indicate that the corner boards or beams at the western end of the Tabernacle were only 1/2 cubit wide, being both “cut out of a cubit beam.” But this would make the corners join without any supporting overlap, hardly a stable situation.

(תְּכֵלֶת, *techelot*),¹⁴ purple or dark red (אַרְגָּמָן, '*ar'gaman*),¹⁵ and scarlet (תּוֹלַעַת שָׁנִי, *tola 'at shani*)¹⁶ material along with fine twisted linen (שֵׁשׁ מְשֻׁזָּר, *sheish mashzar*).¹⁷ Embroidered upon it or woven into the fabric were figures of cherubim.¹⁸ This veil was then hung with clasps of gold attached to four pillars (עַמּוּדִים, '*amudim*) made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Like the boards of the walls, the pillars are supported by silver sockets, though once again no explicit dimensions are given. Exodus 26:17 seems to indicate that all the boards/beams were to be made the same, and that they would fit in similar sockets of silver. The Sages therefore offered two views: either they

¹⁴ Saadia, *Yad, Tzitzith* 2:1; Josephus *Antiquities*, 3:6:4, describe it as “sky-blue.” According to others, it was greenish blue or aquamarine (Rashi; Ibn Ezra; cf. *y.Berakot* 1:5), deep blue, the color of the evening sky (Menachem, quoted in Rashi on Num 15:38), azure or ultramarine (Radak, *Sherashim*) or hyacinth blue (Lxx; cf. *Arukh, teynun*). The Talmud states that it resembled indigo (b.*Menachot* 42b).

This blue dye was taken from an animal known as the *chilazon* (t.*Menachot* 9:6). It is a boneless invertebrate (*y.Shabbat* 1:3), having a shell that grows with it (*Devarim Rabbah* 7.11). It is thus identified with a snail of the *purpura* family (Ravya on b.*Berakhot* 3b; *Mossef HeArukh*, s.v. *Purpura*). The Lxx also occasionally translates *tekhelet* as *oloporporos*, which indicates that it was made from the pure dye of the *purpura*.

There are some who identified the *chilazon* with the common cuttlefish, *Sephia officinalis* (*Eyn Tekhelet*, p. 29), but most evidence contradicts this.

It is known that the ancient Tyrians were skilled in making this sky-blue dye (2Chr 2:6; cf. Ezek 27:16), and that the snails from which it was made were found on the coast of northern Israel and Phoenecia (*Pseudo-Jonathan* on Deut 33:19; b.*Shabbat* 26a). This indicates that it was the famed Tyrian blue. Around the ancient Tyrian dyeworks, shells of the *Murex trunculus* and *Murex brandaris* are found. These dyes were also made in Greece and Italy, (cf. Ezek 27:7; *Iliad* 4:141; Aristotle, *History of Animals* 5:15), and remains of these ancient dyeworks have been found in Athens and Pompeii. The shells found there were the *Purpura haemastoma* and *Murex brandaris* (cf. Pliny, 9:61).

Some have identified the *chilazon* with *Janthina pallia* or *Janthina bicolor*, deep water snails which produce a light violet-blue (hyacinth) dye (Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac, HaLevit Herzog; *The Dying of Purple in Ancient Israel*, quoted in *The Living Torah*, (Maznaim Pub, 1981), p. 381). In ancient times, animals as these were renowned for their dyes (Pliny 9:60, 61).

The dye is removed from a cyst near the head of the snail, preferably while the animal is alive (b.*Shabbat* 75a; Aristotle, *History of Animals* 5:15). It is boiled with alum as a clarifier (b.*Menachot* 42b, Rashi on Ex 25 and on b.*Avodah Zarah* 33b) to produce the dye. The wool is then ground with alkanat root or aloe wood in order for it to take the dye well (*Tad, Tzitzit* 2:2; Pliny 9:63).

Only a few drops of dye could be obtained from each snail (Pliny 9:61), and according to one modern researcher, over 8000 snails would be needed to make a single cubic centimeter of the dye. This explains its high cost and its restriction to royalty [R. Aryeh Kaplan, ed., *The Living Torah*, (Maznaim Pub, 1981), ad. loc., Ex 25.]

¹⁵ Some consider the color to be dark red (Ibn Ezra; *Pesikta Rabbatai* 20:3, 86a) while others state that it is similar to lake, a purplish red dye extracted from lac (Radak, *Sherashim*; Rambam on m.*Kelayim* 9.1). Although the Lxx translates *argaman* as *porphura* or *porphoreus*, which means purple, in ancient times “purple” denoted a deep crimson, most notably the dye obtained from the *purpura* snail. Ancient sources indicate that it was close to the color of fresh blood (*Illiad*, 4:141).

Talmudic sources state that *argaman* was obtained from a living creature (*y.Kelayim* 9:1), and other sources indicate that it was an aquatic creature (1Mac 4:23; Abarbanel on Ex 25:10). Like *tekhelet*, it was obtained from Tyre (2Chr 2:6; cf. Ezek 27:16) as well as Greece and Italy (Ezek 27:7, cf. the Targum on this text).

If this dye were taken from the murex and purpura snail, it may have been taken from *Purpura haemastoma*, known to the ancients as the *buccinum* (Pliny 9:61), which yielded a reddish dye (Aristotle, *History of Animals* 5:15).

In ancient times, material dyed with this color was extremely valuable (cf. b.*Shabbat* 90a; b.*Kelim* 27:12) and it was weighed as carefully as gold (m.*Kelim* 29.4).

¹⁶ *Tola'at shani* in the Hebrew denotes the dye which comes from a mountain worm (t.*Menachot* 9.16) that looks like a red pea (Rashi on Is 1:18). This is the *Kermes biblicus*, known as *kermes* in Arabic (cf. Saadia; Ralbag translates it as *grana*, Spanish for conchineal), the conchineal insect, or shield louse, that lives on oak trees in the Holy Land (cf. Pliny 21:22). There are two species, *Kermes nahalali* and *Kermes greeni*. In the early spring, when the females are filled with red eggs and become pea-shaped, the red dye can be squeezed out of them. (Cf. Lev 14:4-6; Num 19:6)

¹⁷ The use of שֵׁשׁ would indicate that the material was six-ply linen thread (b.*Yoma* 71b), and the “Egyptian-type” linen is referred to, a linen which was particularly silk-like.

¹⁸ Ex 26:31f.

were the same dimensions as the beams which made the walls,¹⁹ or they were half the width (to take only one silver socket) and the same thickness and height.²⁰

The text gives explicit instructions as to where the *parochet* was to be hung: “And you shall hang up the veil under the clasps...”²¹ (וְנִתְּתָה אֶת־הַפְּרֹכֶת תַּחַת הַקְּרָסִים), “the clasps” referring to the clasps which held together the various over-wrappings which had been detailed for the coverings of the *mishkan* (see Fig. 3, p. 17). It will therefore be necessary to understand the dimensions given for these coverings in order to ascertain where the *parochet* was to be placed.

The *mishkan* itself was to be made of ten large tapestries (יְרִיעוֹת, singular יְרִיעָה) woven of fine linen, *techeilet* (sky-blue), scarlet (dark-red) and crimson wool.²² Each tapestry was to have the pattern of cheruvim woven into them, and would be 4 cubits wide and 28 cubits long (see Fig 3, p. 17). Five tapestries were sewn²³ together to form one large unit, and the second 5 were likewise sewn together. Then the two large units were joined via loops of woolen cloth sewn on the inner adjoining edges and joined with golden fasteners (קְרָסֵי זָהָב). There were to be 50 loops on each of the inner adjoining edges and 50 clasps to join the loops.

Each of the larger units, consisting of 5 tapestries would have measured 20 cubits by 28 cubits. With the two joined together by the golden clasps and loops, and being laid upon the beams from the opening toward the back of the structure, the clasps under which the *parochet* was to be hung would have been 20 cubits from the open end of the *mishkan*. The *parochet*, then, would have hung exactly 20 cubits from the eastern end and 10 cubits from the western end of the *mishkan*. Being 28 cubits wide, 10 cubits would cover the expanse of the *mishkan*, leaving 9 cubits to drape down the outside of the walls formed by the joined boards or beams. The tapestries would thus have been 1 cubit short of reaching the ground (see Fig. 3, p. 17 & 4, p. 18).

A second covering of goat's wool acted as a tent over the *mishkan* (יְרִיעַת עִזִּים לְאֹהֶל עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן).²⁴ These coverings consisted of 11 individual panels each measuring 4 cubits by 30 cubits. Five were to be sewn together to form one unit, and the remaining six as a second unit. Fifty loops on the inner adjoining edges of each unit allowed them to be joined via 50 copper clasps. The text gives instructions that the unit consisting of 6 panels was to be toward the eastern end, for it reads “half of the sixth panel shall hang over the front of the tent” (וְכַפְּלֶתָּ הַחֵמֶשׁ וְהַשֵּׁשִׁי וְהַשֵּׁשִׁי יִפְּנֶה אֶל־מִוֶּלֶד פְּנֵי הָאֹהֶל וְכַפְּלֶתָּ).²⁵ It is not certain, however, whether כַּפַּל means “to fold double” or simple “to fold over.”²⁶ If it means “to fold double,” then it would be understood here to mean “fold half of the sixth panel...,” while if its meaning is simply “to fold,” then conceivably the whole sixth panel would have been folded down over the doorway of the tent. Taking the first option (that the sixth panel draped over the front at its halfway mark), then if the 5 beams which held the drape for the entrance added an additional 1.5 cubits to the overall length, the sixth panel of the woolen coverings would have draped down 2.5 cubits and the copper clasps which joined the two larger units together would have been directly above the golden clasps which joined the tapestries. If, however, these 5 beams stood so that they added 1 cubit to the overall length, and the sixth panel

¹⁹ *Maaseh Choshev* 3.1.

²⁰ Abarbanel, ad. loc.

²¹ Ex 26:33.

²² Cf. notes 10-13 above.

²³ So Rashi, Rashbam (b.*Shabbat* 99a) interpret the Hebrew אֶל־אֹהֶל אֶשָׁה of Ex 26:3.

²⁴ Ex 26:7.

²⁵ Ex 26:9.

²⁶ For a full discussion of the possibilities for how the coverings were arranged on the *mishkan*, cf. b.*Shabbat* 98a.

draped down from its midpoint, then 3 cubits would have overlapped the opening, the copper clasps again being directly above the golden clasps of the tapestries (see Fig. 4, p. 18).

The other possibility is that the 5 beams designated for the opening of the *mishkan* did not add to its over all length, being enclosed within the two side walls. In this scenario, if the woolen coverings were situated so that the sixth panel draped down from its midpoint, then 2 cubits covered the doorway, and the copper clasps were offset 2 cubits from the golden clasps directly beneath them. If the sixth panel entirely draped the doorway, then 4 cubits hung down and the copper clasps were directly above the golden ones.

While one cannot be certain, it seems best to understand the descriptions given in Exodus 25-26 as indicating that the 5 beams which held the drape at the opening of the *mishkan* were stationed within the overall length of 30 cubits, for Exodus 26:12 speaks of an “extra half-sheet you shall cause to hang over [תִּסְרַח is 2nd masc. sing. hifil] trailing after the mishkan” (חֲצִי הַיְרִיעָה הָעֹדְפֶת תִּסְרַח עַל אַחֲרֵי הַמִּשְׁכָּן). The Hebrew word עָדַף is understood by the Sages to mean “trail” or “follow” as a woman’s skirts trail behind her as she walks.²⁷ This meaning for the word may be strengthened by its use in the Song of Moses (Deut 32:2; 33:28) meaning “trickle” or “drip.” סָרַח, used only here,²⁸ describes something which projects over, as a plant growing over a rock wall. In this text the words together must describe the woolen covering draping down over the back of the tabernacle and trailing (as it were) upon the ground.

Additional coverings lay upon the woolen ones, described simply as מִכְסֶה, *michseh*, “covering.” One layer of covering was made of ram skins dyed red (עֹרֹת אֵילִם מְאֻדָּמִים) and a second of stretched leather skins (תְּחָשִׁים).²⁹ Some Sages interpret the text to say there is only one additional covering, made of ram’s skins and *tachash* skins,³⁰ but the general consensus is that there were two layers over the woolen covering, making a total of four.

There are no dimensions given for the ram skins and *tachash* skins, but the tradition has been that they did not overlap, hanging down onto the sides, but formed a kind of roof which, most likely, was just slightly larger than the 10 X 30 cubit top of the *mishkan*.

Nothing is mentioned for the floor of the *mishkan*, and one would presume that the ground served as the floor. It was not uncommon among bedouins to cover the dirt floor of their tents with rugs or blankets, but no mention of anything is prescribed for the Tabernacle.

Summary

The detail necessary to understand the dimensions of the Tabernacle may now give way to summary. There is sufficient biblical evidence (though some is surely implicit rather than explicit) to support the long-standing tradition that the *mishkan* was a structure measuring 30 cubits by 10 cubits and that the parochet hung 20 cubits from the opening of the structure, yielding an inner sanctuary of 10 cubits square. The outer sanctuary measured 10 cubits wide, 20 cubits long, and 10 cubits high.

²⁷ b.*Shabbat* 98a.

²⁸ Note the use of the verb in Ezek 17:6 meaning “grow luxuriantly.”

²⁹ Cassuto (*Commentary on Exodus*, Magnes, 1951, p. 326) notes the Arabic *tuhās*, “dolphin,” and that the Hebrew תַּחַשׁ seems obviously cognate. The identification of “dolphin” or “porpoise” skins with Hebrew תַּחַשׁ has been common among commentators. And it is true that dolphins were plentiful in the Red Sea, and were used even into modern times by Bedouins to make sandals. However, Benjamin Noonan has shown that Hebrew תַּחַשׁ most likely is a loanword from Egyptian *ths*, a verb meaning “to stretch leather.” Benjamin Noonan, “Foreign Loanwords and *Kulturwörter* in Northwest Semitic (1400-600 B.C.E.): Linguistic and Cultural Contact in Light of Terminology for Realia,” (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation - HUC, 2012), pp. 214–16.

³⁰ b.*Shabbat* 98a.

The pillars holding the drape at the open end of the *mishkan* as well as the pillars holding the *parochet* serve two functions: 1) to hold up the weavings which closed the Holy Place from the courtyard, and the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place, and 2) to assure that the Ark could not be removed. Thus, the pillars function to assure separation in both directions.

Solomon's Temple

The primary description of the Most Holy Place of Solomon's Temple is given in 1Kings 6. Here, the dimensions of the whole sanctuary are exactly double those of the Tabernacle. The overall length is 60 cubits and the width 20 cubits. The Most Holy Place is 20 cubits square and 20 cubits high, making the Holy Place 20 cubits by 40 cubits.

The label “Most Holy Place” is used of the inner sanctuary³¹ as well as the designation מִבַּיִת לְדָבִיר,³² *mibayit lid'vir*, “house at the rear” (literally), or “innermost house” (translated “inner sanctuary” by NASB and NIV) and simply by דָּבִיר, *d'vir*, “sanctuary” without accompanying terms.³³

The walls of both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place were made of stone covered entirely within by boards of cedar upon which were carved emblems of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers. All of the cedar boards used to line the stone walls were overlaid with gold, as were the floors and the ceilings of both the outer and inner sanctuaries.

A question arises over the absence of the *parochet* and in its place the description of doors of olive wood which separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place (1Ki 6:31):

And for the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood, the lintel and five-sided doorposts. וְאֵת פֶּתַח הַדְּבִיר עָשָׂה דְלָתוֹת עֲצֵי־שֵׁמֶן הָאֵיל מְזוּזוֹת חֲמִשִּׁיתַּיִם:

Yet the parallel text of 2Chron 3:14 speaks of Solomon making the *parochet*.

He made the veil of violet, purple, crimson and fine linen, and he worked cherubim on it. וַיַּעַשׂ אֶת־הַפָּרֹכֶת הַכֶּלֶת וְאֶרְגָּמָן וְכִרְמִיל וְבוּץ וַיַּעַל עָלָיו כְּרוּבִים:

Yet the Chronicler's summary of Solomon's work mentions the doors which opened into inner sanctuary.

Solomon also made all the things that were in the house of God: even the golden altar, the tables with the bread of the Presence on them, the lampstands with their lamps of pure gold, to burn in front of the inner sanctuary in the way prescribed; the flowers, the lamps, and the tongs of gold, of purest gold; and the snuffers, the bowls, the spoons and the firepans of pure gold; and the entrance of the house, its inner doors for the holy of holies and the doors of the house, that is, of the nave, of gold. (2Chron 4:19–22)

So the question remains: how did the *parochet* function in relationship to the doors in Solomon's temple?

The description of the doors and their doorposts in 1Ki 6:31 is difficult to interpret and has therefore given rise to various translations in the English versions:

³¹ 1Ki 6:16; 7:50; 8:6.

³² 1Ki 6:16.

³³ 1Ki 6:5, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 31; 7:49 (=2Chr 4:20); 8:6, 8 (=2Chr 5:7, 9); 2Chr 3:16; Ps 28:2. The derivation of the term דָּבִיר is uncertain, but if it derives from the common verb דָּבַר, “to speak,” then this inner sanctuary was understood as the place where HaShem spoke to the priest and revealed His divine will (thus the KJV of 1Ki 6:31 uses the word “oracle.”)

And for the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood, the lintel and five-sided doorposts. (NASB)

For the entrance of the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood with five-sided jambs. (NIV)

For the entrance of the Shrine he made doors of olive wood, the pilasters and the doorposts having five sides. (JPS)

And for the entering of the oracle he made doors of olive tree: the lintel and side posts were a fifth part of the wall. (KJV)

For the entrance to the inner sanctuary he made doors of olive wood; the lintel and the doorposts formed a pentagon. (RSV)

At the entrance to the inner shrine he made a double door of wild olive wood; the pilasters and the doorposts were pentagonal. (REB)

The words which cause the variation in translation, and about which the commentators disagree are **הָאֵיל** and **הַמְּשִׁית**. In Holladay,³⁴ **הָאֵיל** is listed under root III but with a question mark: “archit. tech. term?, ‘gate-post,’ ‘door-post.’” And he notes the passages in Ezekiel where the term apparently has a similar meaning (Ezek 40:9-37, 48). Koehler/Baumgartner³⁵ suggests “side-pillar” or “pillar.” BDB³⁶ has “pilaster or projection in the wall at each side of an entrance.” The Aramaic equivalent is **אֵילָא** found in the Targum to Ezekiel 40:48.³⁷ The Targum on 1Ki 6:31 has **אֵילָהִי**, “but,” apparently misreading the Hebrew for **אֵילִי**. The Peshitta has **פְּסִיסָא**, “*παραστάς*, door-post, lintel.”³⁸ The Lxx and other versions translate the verse without reference to the terms in question.

The use of the word in the Ezek 40 indicates that it is not to be understood as the doorway or opening itself, since the measurements for the doorway (8 cubits) differs from that given to the **אֵיל**, which is 2 cubits (Ezek 40:9). This would seem to substantiate the generally held opinion that the word denotes a door-post or lintel.

Kiel and Delitzsch³⁹ suggest that **מְזוּזוֹת** is in apposition to **אֵיל**, and should be translated “the projection of the door-posts....” In Ezekiel, the only other time where the root III **אֵיל** is used, the word obviously refers to some form of posts or pillars. It would seem best, then, to understand the phrase along the lines of Kiel and Delitzsch, taking **אֵיל** to refer to protruding door-posts of some sort.

The additional word **הַמְּשִׁית** is taken by Kiel and Delitzsch to mean “fifth,” as the word does in every other occurrence of the Tanakh.⁴⁰ The KJV and ASV both translate “fifth,” while nearly all other English translations understand the word to mean “five-sided” or “pentagon.” Furthermore, Kiel and Delitzsch understand the text to be describing the framework of the doors to have occupied “the fifth part of the breadth of the wall”⁴¹ but there is

³⁴ William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1971), p. 12.

³⁵ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Brill, 1985), p. 37.

³⁶ Brown, Driver, Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1953), p. 18.

³⁷ Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim et. al.* (הרוב, n.d.), p. 48.

³⁸ Payne-Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Eisenbrauns, 1998), p. 459; Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon* (Eisenbrauns/Gorgias Press, 2009), p. 1233.

³⁹ Kiel and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (Eerdmans, 1973), 3.80-81.

⁴⁰ Lev 22:14; 27:19, 31; Jer 36:9.

⁴¹ Kiel and Delitzsch, *Ibid.*, p. 81.

nothing in the sentence itself (or even the immediate context) which suggests this is how the word is to be taken. Interestingly, the Peshitta has **ܡܚܡܫܬܐ**, from **ܡܚܡܥ**, “strengthened,” which might suggest an original **חֲמִשִּׁית**, “pentagon,” since the diagonal pieces would strengthen the overall structure. The Vulgate reads similarly: *postesque angulorum quinque*, “doorposts angled (in the shape of) a pentagon.” What may strengthen the idea of reading **חֲמִשִּׁית** as **חֲמִשִּׁית** is the analogous wording of 1Kin 7:5, 1Kings 7:5 **וְכָל-הַפְּתָחִים וְהַמְּזוּזוֹת רַבְעִים שְׁקָף**, “and all the openings and doorposts were squared lumber (**שְׁקָף** is a *hapax*).⁴² Regardless of the meaning of **שְׁקָף**, the word **רַבְעִים** surely means “square.” Thus original **חֲמִשִּׁית** would render the phrase “the protruding door-posts in the shape of a pentagon.” Interestingly, one of the panels in the west wall mural of the Dura -Europus synagogue pictures the inner doors shaped in the pentagon fashion.⁴³ Rashi takes a slightly different approach, interpreting **חֲמִשִּׁית** as “five sided” but arranging the five in a square with two headers at the top of the doors. (See , Fig. 6, p. 19, for a representation of each option.)

Narkiss suggests that the term **חֲמִשִּׁית** refers to five frames put one inside the other in a telescoping fashion, making the doors’ opening like that of the windows, i.e., narrowing through its width.⁴⁴ But there is no sure example of such a structure for the opening of doors in Temples of the ANE, and such an interpretation of the Hebrew text is tentative at best.

It is not certain if the doors were part of a solid wall or not, though the text may indicate that they were. 1Ki 6:16 reads that Solomon built the Most Holy Place at the rear of the structure using cedar boards which extended from the floor to the ceiling. We may presume this included a wall which separated the **הַיִּכָּל** from the **דְּבִיר**. Rambam states: “The first **בֵּית** had a wall which was one cubit thick that separated between the **קֹדֶשׁ** and the **קֹדֶשׁ הַקֳּדָשִׁים**.”⁴⁵ A two-part question then arises: (1) did the space of the cubit (thickness of the wall) belong to the **הַיִּכָּל** or to the **דְּבִיר**? This question is important because the space of the wall needed to be reckoned with either the sanctity of the **דְּבִיר** or the **הַיִּכָּל**. Thus, (2) what level of holiness should be ascribed to the space of a cubit which separated the **הַיִּכָּל** from the **דְּבִיר**? If it belonged to the **הַיִּכָּל**, then the priests could stand in the doorway (if we may assume the doors hung mid-span of the cubit width). If, however, the cubit span belonged to the **דְּבִיר**, it would need to be avoided by all but the **בְּהֵן הַגְּדוּל**.

According to the Sages,⁴⁶ when the Second Temple was built the builders could not decide whether the cubit width of the wall which separated the **הַיִּכָּל** from the **דְּבִיר** should come from the 20 cubits of the **דְּבִיר** or the 40 cubits of the **הַיִּכָּל**. As a result, they made the **דְּבִיר** its full 20 cubits, and the **הַיִּכָּל** its full 40 cubits and added a cubit between making the overall length of the structure 61 cubits as compared with the 60 cubits of the First Temple.

Furthermore, while the Sages could not agree as to what level of holiness the cubit span of the wall consisted of in Solomon's Temple, in the Second Temple the problem was solved by hanging two curtains to enclose the cubit width which separated the **הַיִּכָּל** from the **דְּבִיר**. Since this was an additional cubit (making the overall length of the structure 61 cubits), its space was considered neither on the level of the **הַיִּכָּל** nor that of the **דְּבִיר**, but transitional space unto itself.⁴⁷ As such it was given the designation **טְרַקְסִין**, taken by Jastrow as a transliteration of **τράραξις**, accusative of **τράραξις**, “confusion,” for the Sages were not able to resolve whether the space should

⁴² For the formation of adverbs from substantives, note GK §100.

⁴³ Marie-Henriette Gates, “Dura-Europos: A Fortress of Syro-Mesopotamian Art” *BAR* 47.3 (Sept, 1984), 173.

⁴⁴ Bazalel Narkiss, “Temple” in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 16 vols. (Keter, 1972), 15:948.

⁴⁵ *Hilchot Beit HaBechirah* 4:2. [Quoted from Eliyahu Talgour, *שאלו שלום ירושלים*, (S.I.E., 1994), p. 87. Cf. also *m.Middot* 4.7; *b.Yoma* 5.1, 51b; *b.Bava Metzia* 3a.

⁴⁶ cf. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

have been taken from the הֵיכָל or the דְּבִיר.⁴⁸ Later rabbis (Rambam, etc.) describe the 1 cubit area as an area of transition, which had a higher sanctity than the הֵיכָל but not as high as the דְּבִיר. Since the Shekinah dwelt in the דְּבִיר, and not in the הֵיכָל, it had lower sanctity. It therefore provided a transitional space for the High Priest to pass through before entering the severe sanctification of the דְּבִיר and the Presence of the Shekinah.

The doors and wall which separated the הֵיכָל from the דְּבִיר in Solomon's Temple are regularly referred to by the Sages as being a cubit thick.⁴⁹ This seems to be likely in light of the weight of the doors and the necessary bulk of the walls and doorposts to carry such weight. The exact measurements of the doors are not given, though Montgomery shows close parallels to other Temples of the ANE, and in these temples the doors are nearly the height of the structure, only leaving room for the substantial header.⁵⁰ 2Kings 18:16 indicates that the doors were considered worthy enough that they were taken down by Hezekiah and given to the king of Assyria as tribute.⁵¹

The veil (פְּרֹכֶת) is not mentioned in the initial description of Solomon's temple in 1Kings, nor is it mentioned anywhere in the books of Kings. However, the Chronicler makes a direct mention of the construction of the veil but gives no further description of it being hung or placed in the הֵיכָל:

And he made the veil of violet, purple, crimson and fine linen, and he worked cherubim on it. (2Chron 3:14)

That the veil hung in Solomon's temple seems reasonable in spite of the fact that it is not mentioned in 1Kings,⁵² for when the doors were removed under Hezekiah there must have been some kind of separation between the הֵיכָל and the דְּבִיר.

Where, then, did the veil hang in relationship to the doors? The Hebrew text gives us no answer to this question. It could have hung on the הֵיכָל side, covering the doors altogether, or it could have hung on the דְּבִיר side, meaning it would not have been seen except when the doors themselves were opened. Josephus, however, clearly describes the veil as hanging before the doors (i.e., in the הֵיכָל):

He also had veils of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and the brightest and softest of linen, with the most curious flowers wrought upon them, which were to be drawn before those doors.... He also had curtains drawn over these doors [those entering into the הֵיכָל] in like manner as they were drawn over the inner doors of the most holy place; but the porch of the of the Temple had nothing of that sort.⁵³

Josephus' description of having the veils "drawn" over the doors would indicate that in one way or another they were able to be drawn aside for entrance through the doors. It is not clear whether his description of "veils"

⁴⁸ Jastrow, *Op. cit.*, p. 558, "טְרָקְסִין." Cf. m.*Yoma* 5:1ff.

⁴⁹ cf. b.*Yoma* 52a-b; m.*Middot* 4.7.

⁵⁰ James A. Montgomery, *The Books of Kings* (T&T Clark, 1951), p. 158. See also the comments of Harold Mare, *The Archaeology of the Jerusalem Area* (Baker, 1987), p. 75, n. 12 where he notes an example of a "pointed arch" (though admittedly much earlier than Solomon's Temple, i.e., ca. 1400 BCE) in the Lion Gate at Mycenae in Greece.

⁵¹ The translations of the NIV and NASB are misleading. Nothing in the verse describes stripping the gold off from the doors, but rather of cutting the doors down along with the doorposts. The JPS translation follows the Hebrew text much better. Cf. b.*Berachot* 10b where the Aramaic quote of this text follows it closely, indicating that the doors were sent to the king of Assyria (ושגרם למלך אשור) as does the MT (וייתנם למלך אשור). Cp. also b.*Pesachim* 56a.

⁵² Myers (*II Chronicles* in the *Anchor Bible*, [Doubleday, 1965], p. 18) mentions that Rudolph (*Chronikbücher* [Tübingen, 1955]) feels there has been a mixing up of "chains" and "veil" in 1Ki 6:21b since the Hebrew terms are similar (רתוקות/פרכת) but there is no textual evidence whatsoever for such a suggestion.

⁵³ Josephus, *Ant.* 8:3.

(plural) means he refers to both those before the doors of the הַיְכָל and the דְּבִיר or whether he means that each of the entrances had two veils which could be drawn apart to reveal the doors. Which ever the case, Josephus' record would give weight to the view that the veil was hung in the הַיְכָל and therefore covered the doors which entered into the דְּבִיר.

The Holy of Holies in the Second Temple

A detailed description of Zerubbabel's Temple is not found in the scriptures, though the Sages regularly speak of it as having been built after the pattern of Solomon's Temple. Apart from the adding of one cubit to the overall length (see above), the dimensions would have been primarily the same, i.e., 20 cubits wide by 61 cubits long, the Most Holy Place (דְּבִיר) being 20 cubits square and the Holy Place (הַיְכָל) being 20 by 40 cubits.

The interior of Solomon's Temple was covered entirely with cedar overlaid with gold. Descriptions from the rabbinic sources indicate that the interior of the Herodian Second Temple was also golden, though it is not quite certain if the language describes an overlay of gold throughout, our only in the Most Holy Place. In describing the gold of the second temple, we read:

It was related: it did not take long before they covered the whole Temple with gold plaques a cubit square of the thickness of a gold denar. And on festivals they used to lay them together and place them on a high eminence on the Temple Mount, so that the Festival pilgrims might see that their workmanship was beautiful, and that there was no imperfection in them.⁵⁴

Yet in another reference it appears these gold plaques were only in the Most Holy Place:

For we learned: what were they doing with the surplus of the offerings [for the Temple funds]? Beaten gold [plates that served as] a covering for [the walls and floor] of the Holy of Holies [קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים].⁵⁵

Josephus, however, makes this assessment of Solomon's use of gold:

And, to say all in a word, he [Solomon] left no part of the temple, neither internal nor external, but what was covered with gold.⁵⁶

It seems likely that the interior of the Second Temple during the time of Zerubbabel was not overlaid with gold and that during the expansion of the Temple mount under Herod there was an effort to refurbish the Temple to match more closely the glory of Solomon's temple. Collection and application of gold to the Temple may well have been a concerted effort of the Sadducean priesthood.

The height of the דְּבִיר of the Second Temple was patterned after Solomon's Temple, though it was higher by 10 cubits. The דְּבִיר was 20 cubits high (inside dimensions), making it a perfect square (20 X 20 X 20) as in the First Temple. A second story over the Most Holy Place existed entirely for workers who yearly were lowered in baskets through the ceiling to make repairs to the Most Holy Place. The reasoning was that such a method kept the workers from gazing at the sacred space for prolonged periods, and never allowed them to stand there.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ b.*Pesachim* 7a.

⁵⁵ b.*Ketuvot* 106a.

⁵⁶ Josephus, *Ant.* 8:3:3.

⁵⁷ m.*Middot* 4:5; b.*Pesachim* 86a.

The rabbinic literature uniformly reports that the Holy of Holies in the Second Temple was empty, and had been empty since the early prophets.⁵⁸ A number of traditions exist to explain the absence of the Ark in the Second Temple. One such tradition was that it was taken in the exile and never returned,⁵⁹ while a second has it that Josiah, believing the prophet regarding the coming exile, hid the Ark away for safe keeping.⁶⁰ A further rabbinic tradition has it that the Ark was hidden under the Most Holy Place below the Temple Mount.⁶¹

Josephus mentions items from the Temple which show up as booty when Titus returns home after the sack of Jerusalem:

... and for the other spoils, they were carried in great plenty. But for those that were taken in the temple of Jerusalem, they made the greatest figure of them all; that is, the golden table, of the weight of many talents; the candlestick also, that was made of gold. ...and the last of all the spoils was carried the Law of the Jews.⁶²

He goes on to describe how Vespasian built a temple to Peace and deposited there, in the royal palace, these same objects.

But still he gave orders that they should lay up their Law, and the purple veils of the holy place, in the royal palace itself, and keep them there.⁶³

Since Josephus himself knows that the Most Holy Place was empty,⁶⁴ we should most likely understand the reference to “the Law of the Jews” as referring to a Torah scroll, not the tablets of the Law. The absence of the Ark in the list of booty further substantiates that the Most Holy Place of the Herodian Temple was empty.

Furthermore, there is the tradition among the Sages that the Shechinah never entered the Second Temple, or at least departed after the death of Simon the Righteous.⁶⁵ This is blamed upon bloodshed, idolatry,⁶⁶ and gossip.⁶⁷ Yet in spite of the fact that the Shekinah was not visible in the Temple, the belief that God dwelt there remained.⁶⁸

According to the Mishnah, on Yom HaKippurim the fire-pan and incense of the High Priest were placed upon the rock where the Ark originally rested (called the Foundation Stone, *הַיְסוּד*⁶⁹), a stone which was raised three

⁵⁸ E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE - 66 CE* (Trinity, 1992), pp. 62-63; Josephus, *War* 5.219; *m.Yoma* 5:2, cf. *b.Sanhedrin* 26a.; *b.Menachot* 27b; *y.Shekalim* I.1

⁵⁹ *b.Yoma* 54a.

⁶⁰ *b.Horayot* 12a.

⁶¹ *b.Yoma* 53b. Note also M. Haran, “The Disappearance of the Ark,” *IEJ* 13:46-58, also included in Harry M. Orlinsky, ed., *Israel Exploration Journal Reader*, 2 vols. (KTAV, 1981), 1:262-274.

⁶² Josephus, *Wars*, 7:5:5.

⁶³ *Wars*, 7:5:7.

⁶⁴ See note 57 above.

⁶⁵ 3rd century BCE, cf. Steinsaltz, *Reference Guide* (Random House, 1989), p. 31.

⁶⁶ *b.Shabbat* 33a.

⁶⁷ *b.Sota* 47b.

⁶⁸ *Matt* 23:21.

⁶⁹ *m.Yoma* 5:2.

finger-breadths above the floor.⁷⁰ The blood was simply sprinkled in the air, once upward, and seven times downward.

If we accept the unified testimony of rabbinic literature as well as the report of Josephus that the Most Holy Place of the second temple was empty, we may also recognize that the Yom Kippur ritual described in the Mishnah (which involves the Ark) never actually took place. The substitutions and deletions in the ritual (substituting the Foundation Stone for the mercy seat, etc.) may well have been considered by some as falling short of the mark. Such an opinion may have cast the whole Temple ritual into suspicion, and diminished the sanctity of the Temple in the minds of some.

Zerubbabel's Temple was significantly less elaborate than Solomon's, as the disappointment of the people evidenced.⁷¹ In place of the magnificent golden doors between the Holy Place and Most Holy Place, rabbinic literature describes a double curtain (veil) separating the הֵיכָל from the דְּבִיר, with a cubit width between the two. The Mishnah does, however, register a debate with R. Yose, (135-170 CE), who maintained there was only one curtain.⁷² Neither of the curtains spanned the entire width of the structure: the outer one began at the north wall and left a gap at the south wall, while the inner curtain began at the south wall and left a gap at the north wall (see Fig. 7, p. 19).

Josephus speaks of large doors (55 cubits high and 16 cubits wide) covered by an equally large curtain which opened into the הֵיכָל, and a veil which separated the הֵיכָל from the דְּבִיר.

...but then this house, as it was divided into two parts, the inner part was lower than the appearance of the outer, and had golden doors of fifty-five cubits altitude, and sixteen in breadth; but before these doors there was a veil of equal largeness with the doors. It was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with blue, and fine linen, and scarlet, and purple, and of a contexture that was truly wonderful.... This curtain had also embroidered upon it all that was mystical in the heavens, excepting that of the [twelve] signs, representing living creatures.⁷³

A little later in this same context Josephus describes the Most Holy Place:

But the inmost part of the temple of all was of twenty cubits. This was also separated from the outer part by a veil. In this there was nothing at all. It was inaccessible and inviolable, and not to be seen by any; and was called the Holy of Holies.⁷⁴

The large veil which covered the outer doors of the Temple is also described in the Letter of Aristeas:

On the top of the hill the Temple had been constructed, towering above all. There were three enclosing walls, over seventy cubits in size, the width being proportionate and the length of the equipment of the house likewise; everything was built with a magnificence and expense which excelled in every respect. It was obvious that the expenditure of money had been unrestricted upon the door, the fastenings upon it by the doorposts, and the strength of the lintels. The configuration of the veil was in respects very similar to

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Haggai 2:1-9.

⁷² m. *Yoma* 5.1f. R. Yose (135–170 CE) states that there was only one curtain separating the הֵיכָל from the דְּבִיר on the basis of Ex 26:33 which states “And the veil [singular] shall divide for you between the holy place and the most holy place.” It seems likely, however, that R. Yose is attempting to present the second temple as conforming to the commandments given regarding the *Mishkan* and not giving an actual historical account.

⁷³ *Wars*, 5:5.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

the door furnishing, and most of all in view of continuous movement caused to the material by the undercurrent of the air. It was continuous because the undercurrent started from the bottom and the billowing extended to the rippling at the top—the phenomenon making a pleasant and unforgettable spectacle.⁷⁵

We may conclude on the unified testimony of the rabbinic literature and Josephus' description that Zerubbabel's Temple used curtains to cover the outer doors which opened into the הַיְכָל as well as to separate the הַיְכָל from the דְּבִיר. There was not a solid wall with doors separating the הַיְכָל from the דְּבִיר as in Solomon's Temple.⁷⁶

There is also some mention in ancient documents of the lintel which supported the huge doors at the entrance to the הַיְכָל. Josephus mentions that lintels were over the doors at the entrance of the Temple,⁷⁷ and a reference to the apocryphal work, *The Epistle of the Nazarenes* by Jerome also speaks of the lintel:

But in the Gospel which is written in Hebrew characters we read not that the veil of the temple was rent, but that the lintel of the temple of wondrous size collapsed.⁷⁸

A similar quote in the “*Historia passionis Domini*,” a work of the Middle Ages reads:

Also in the Gospel of the Nazarenes we read that at the time of Christ's death the lintel of the temple, of immense size, had split.⁷⁹

It has been suggested that the lintel which broke was in fact that of the Nicanor Gate, which stood directly east of the Temple's opening.⁸⁰ It seems more likely, however, that the lintel which split was the one supporting the doors of the הַיְכָל, for had it been the lintel of the Nicanor Gate, one might expect it to have been so identified.

An interesting parallel is the Gospel's mention of an earthquake at the time of Yeshua's crucifixion. Could this have been the event which cracked the lintel? The Gospels consistently report the event of the torn veil, but only Matthew gives the additional information about the earthquake:

And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split, (Matt 27:51)

And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Mark 15:38)

...the sun being obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two.(Luke 23:45)

We may speculate that the veil which covered the large doors before the הַיְכָל was suspended from the stone lintel above the entrance, and that if this lintel did split during the earthquake mentioned in Matthew it would

⁷⁵ *Letter of Aristaeas*, 84-86, quoted from James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (Doubleday, 1985), 2:18.

⁷⁶ b.*Yoma* 51b, et. al.

⁷⁷ Josephus, *Ant.*, 15:11:3.

⁷⁸ Jerome, *Epist. 120 to Hedibia* and *Comm. on Mt.* on 27:51, cited from Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols. (Westminster Press, 1963), 1:150.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸⁰ It derived its name from Nicanor who imported its Corinthian bronze doors. Josephus refers to it as the “Corinthian Gate” (*Wars* 5:5:3). The lintel which held the upper sockets of the immense doors is estimated by some as weighing 30 tons (Nathan Kaplan, “The Site of Solomon's Temple,” unpublished monograph, n.d., p. 15). For Mishnaic references, cf. m.*Middot* 1.4; 2.3, 6; m.*Yoma* 3.10; m.*Shekalim* 6.3; m.*Sota* 1.5; m.*Negaim* 14.8 and corresponding *Gemarat*.

have undoubtedly torn the veil from top to bottom.

In addition, the rabbinic materials record a strange phenomenon attached to the doors of the הֵיכָל:

Our Rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot [‘For the Lord’] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-colored strap become white; nor did the western most light shine; and the doors of the Hekal would open by themselves, until R. Johanan b. Zakkai rebuked them, saying: Hekal, Hekal, why wilt thou be the alarmer thyself? I know about thee that thou wilt be destroyed, for Zechariah ben Ido has already prophesied concerning thee: Open thy doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour thy cedars.⁸¹

This, in turn, may be collated with the recognized *halakah* that until the doors of the הֵיכָל were opened, no sacrifices were considered valid.

Why is ‘the door of the tent of meeting’ written in one case, whereas ‘before the tent of meeting’ is written in the others?⁸² We are thereby informed of Rab Judah’s teaching in Samuel’s name. For Rab Judah said in Samuel’s name: If a peace-offering is slaughtered before the doors of the hekal are opened, it is invalid, for it is said, ‘And he shall kill it at the entrance [opening] of the tent of meeting’: when it is open, but not when it is shut.⁸³

If the data are indicating an historical reality, i.e., that the veil spoken of in the Gospels was in fact that veil which covered the doors to the הֵיכָל and not the curtains between the הֵיכָל and the דְּבִיר, we need to reinvestigate what the torn veil signifies. When coupled with the phenomenon of the doors opening on their own accord, it would seem that the significance is the acceptance of the sacrifice of Yeshua. In a corrupt priesthood where the closing and opening of the doors to the הֵיכָל could effectively control the worship of sacrifice, the ripping of the veil by the splitting of the lintel, and the opening of the doors on their own accord would emphasize that the sacrifice of Yeshua had, indeed, been accepted.

How might this interpretation fit the use of the “torn veil” motif by the writer to the Messianic Jews (Hebrews)? The flesh of Yeshua is metaphorically compared to the veil in 10:19-22:

19 Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

But which veil is our author speaking of? He knows of two veils (6:19), and though he uses the Tabernacle rather than Temple as his model (as does the Mishnah at times), we may speculate that he was aware of the standing *halakah* that, like the necessity for open doors of the Temple to validate sacrifices, so only when the Tabernacle was erected and fully functional were sacrifices valid.⁸⁴ The immediate context is of bringing sacrifice, as the term “draw near” (v. 22) indicates. “Let us draw near” (προσερχώμεθα) would remind one of the Hebrew

⁸¹ b.Yoma 39b. The quote is from Zech 11:1, and he is referred to as “ben Ido” even though Ido was his grandfather because in rabbinic literature it is common to refer to a famous relative as the progenitor of the following generations.

⁸² Lev 3:2ff is the context of the discussion.

⁸³ b.Zevachim 55b; y.Shekalim v, 48d; m.Tamid 1-3; m.Yoma 2. Cf. S. Safrai, “The Temple” in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, 2 vols., *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, S. Safrai and M. Stern, eds. (Van Gorcum, 1976), 2:888 for similar references in the Yerushalami.

⁸⁴ Ibid. where the *halakah* is also applied to the Tabernacle (*mishkan*).

קָרַב used often in the Tanakh of bringing a sacrifice.⁸⁵ The “full assurance” of faith would thus be the assurance that the sacrifice would be valid. For the writer to the Messianic Jews, the torn veil bespeaks access to the whole sacrificial ceremony in the hands of a truly righteous priesthood (Melchizedekian) which would represent the worshiper with full integrity. The open doors of the הַיְכָל, then, would fit this picture perfectly.

Summary and Applications

The Tabernacle was given to demonstrate the spheres of sanctification necessary for the dwelling of God with Israel. From the camp to the courtyard, from the courtyard to the Holy Place, and from the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place, the separation of each became more and more severe, until at last only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and only once yearly. The veil which separated the courtyard from the Holy Place (with 5 pillars) and the veil (פְּרֻקָּת) separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place†(with 4 pillars) were viewed as absolute separation barriers in the moveable shrine.

The dimensions of the Most Holy Place forming a perfect square link it with the other sacred articles in square dimension, namely, the Bronze Altar and the Golden Altar of incense, both of which play a central role in the yearly Yom Kippur ritual of the Most Holy Place. This undoubtedly was to reveal God's intended means of atonement, the combining of sacrifice (death for life) and priestly intercession (incense as symbolic of prayer⁸⁶), ultimately to be fulfilled in the oblation and intercession of the Melchizedekian High Priest, Yeshua.

When compared to the Tabernacle, Solomon made drastic changes both in dimensions and structure when he built the Temple, yet the presence of the Shekinah declared HaShem's pleasure with his work.⁸⁷ Though enlarged, the Most Holy Place still remained a perfect cube, and thus maintained the symbology of perfection which the dwelling God of Israel required. The permanent wall separating the Holy Place (הַיְכָל) from the Most Holy Place (דְּבִיר) represented the permanent dwelling of God with His people, and is reflected in the words spoken by God Himself, that He would put His name, eyes, and heart in that place forever.⁸⁸ The permanent structure, then, foreshadowed the eternal promise of HaShem that this would be the place from which He would reveal His Name for all time and for all peoples. Eschatologically, the Temple of Solomon stands as the foreshadowing of the fulfilled Abrahamic covenant, when His house would be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.⁸⁹

The Second Temple built by Zerubbabel and expanded by Herod marked an attempt by Israel to fashion her own means of atonement. Though certainly God commanded through His prophets the rebuilding of the Temple, and encouraged that it be utilized as a regathering of the people unto Him, in fact that Temple never functioned as it was supposed to. Overrun by the institutions of the Sages, the Shekinah (by some accounts) never entered the structure and the Ark of the Covenant never rested there. Enshrined in man-made religion, the Messiah Himself declared that what should have been a house of prayer had, in fact, become a den of thieves. The glorious description of the Temple which the prophet Ezekiel gave to the exiles was not to be realized in the Second Temple. Though in His mercy HaShem accepted all who worshiped there in spirit and truth, the inevitable destruction of the Temple was prophesied by the prophets, understood by the Sages, and sealed by the rejection of

⁸⁵ E.g., Ex 29:10; Lev 1:2ff.

⁸⁶ Cf. Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8; 8:3.

⁸⁷ 1Ki 8:10, 11.

⁸⁸ 1Ki 9:1-4.

⁸⁹ Is 56:7, cp. Zech 14:16ff. Note also the clear references to the foreigner who joins himself to Israel in the prayer of dedication made by Solomon, 1Ki 8:41f.

the Messiah. The breaking of the lintel, the tearing of the outer veil, and the opening of the doors symbolically demonstrated that in her attempt to regulate worship, Israel's Sages had missed the very object of worship itself, Yeshua HaMashiach. Destroyed by her enemies, Israel, dispersed among the nations, awaits the dawn of the eschaton when the Temple prophesied by Ezekiel will in fact be built, and the universal rule of the Messiah from that place will commence.

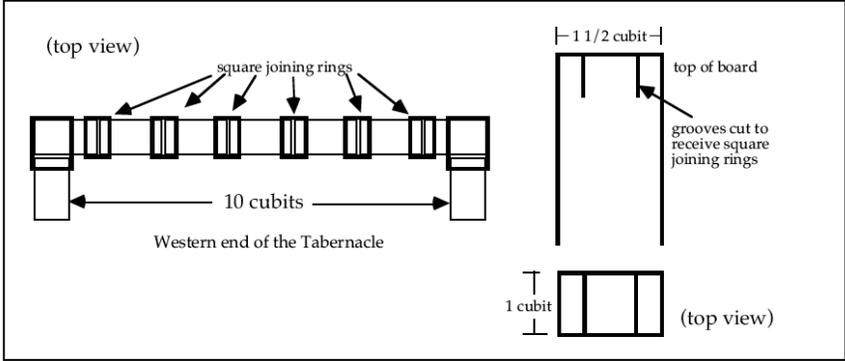


Figure 1

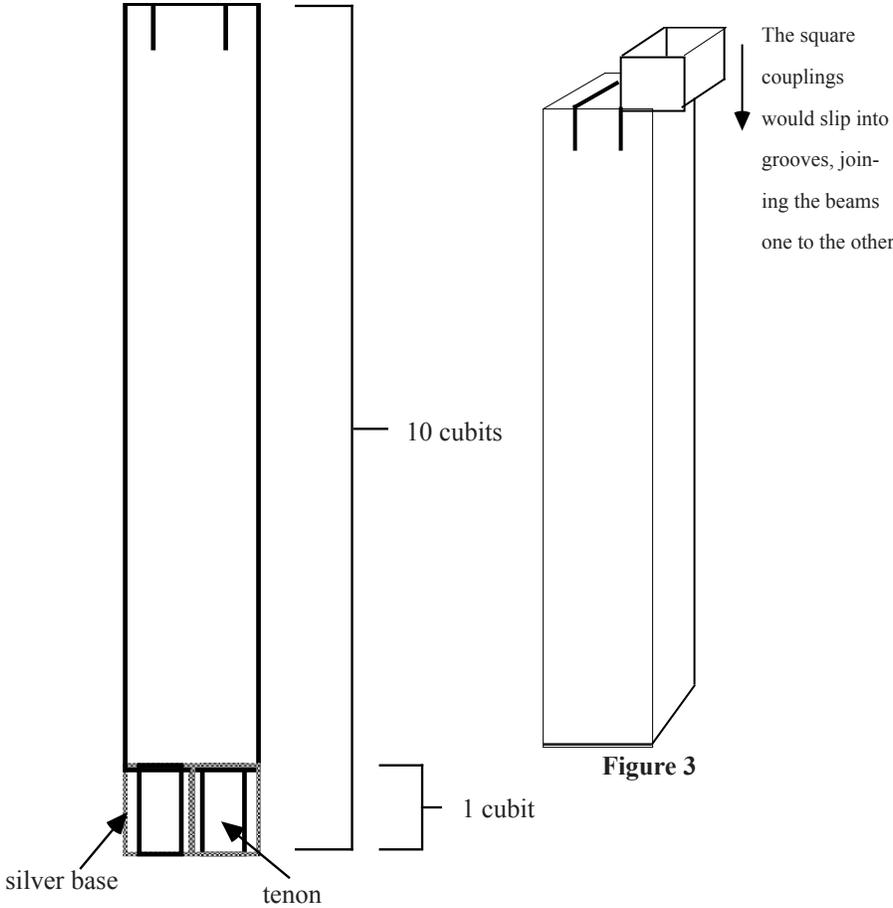


Figure 2

Figure 3

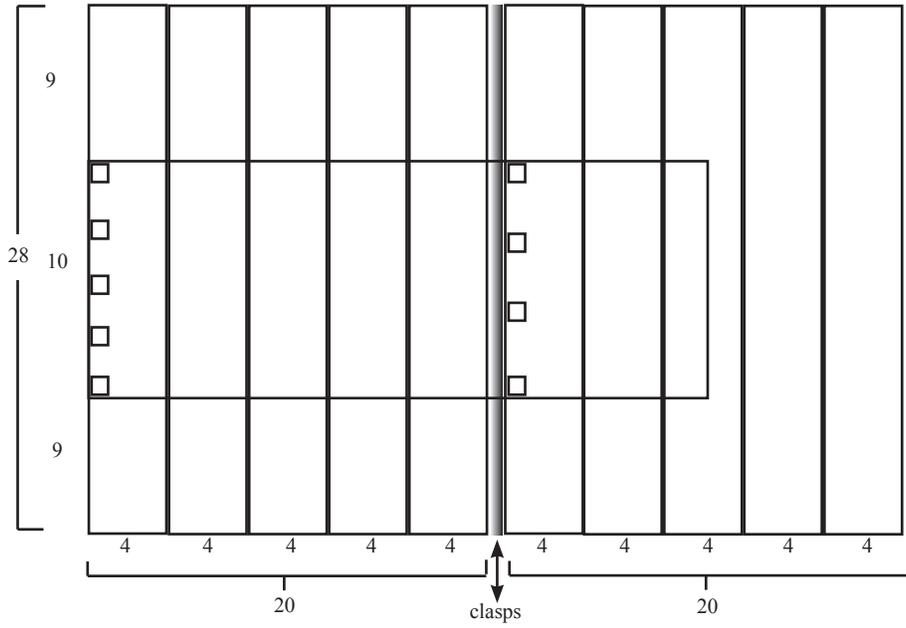


Figure 4
Coverings (Tapestries) of the *Mishcan*

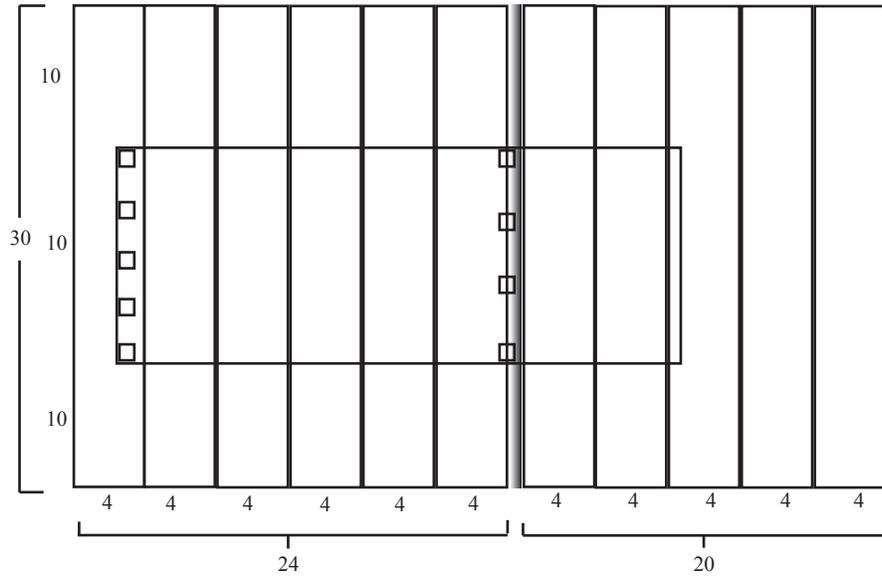


Figure 5
Outer (woollen) Coverings of the *Mishcan*

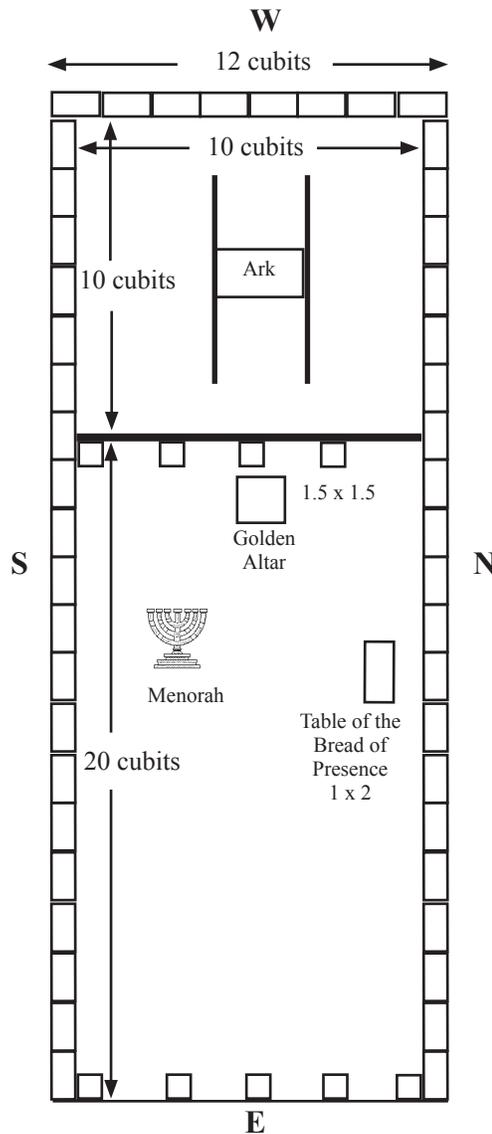


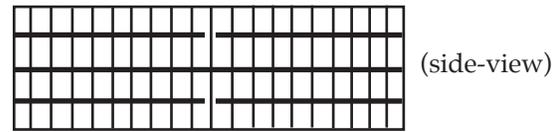
Figure 7

the inside. The arrangement of the tapestries and the outer woollen covers were such that the clasps of each did not fall directly upon each other. The outer coverings consisted of 11 panels, while the tapestries were only 10 panels. The eleventh panel of the outer covering folded in half over the front of the *mishkan*. This shifted the entire covering two cubits, so that the clasps of the outer coverings were two cubits offset from the inner tapestries. The exact reason for this is not stated, but it would have kept light from coming in through the seam, making the only light in the Most Holy Place that of the *Shekinah*, and in the Holy Place that of the *menorah*.

Thirdly, for the arrangement of the pillars holding the *perochet* and the outer veil or curtain there are given no specific details. Where they equal distance apart? It is clear that the *perochet* was not divided (as is typical of a modern-day stage curtain), so the *cohen gadol* would have entered from the side rather than from the middle. It may have been that the pillars were arranged to accommodate this, and they are so arranged in Figure 6. The pillars at the opening of the *mishkan* may have been evenly arranged, since there were five in a 10 cubit span.

The silver sockets into which the beams were placed to form the walls of the *mishkan* were

Figure 6



Possible arrangement of the bars (בְּרִיחִים) that held the wall beams

There are a number of issues that confront us when we attempt to understand all of the construction details given to Moses. It is quite clear that those things we cannot be sure of, were made clear to Moses by having seen the model of the Tabernacle on the mountain.

First, the idea that there were some type of interwoven frames to secure the top of each of the beam is speculative, but seems to be implied by 26:24 where it states of the corner beams that they were “joined together at the top” with a ring (טְבִיעוֹת). The special notice regarding the corners must be that the corner beams had a special mortise at the top for connecting the two walls.

Secondly, it is never stated whether the pillars that hold the *perochet* separating the Holy and Most Holy are inside or outside of the veil. Figure 6 has them on the outside, but others think they were on

one talent of silver each (Ex 38:27). A talent was approximately 150 lbs., and calculating the size of the beam (1 x 1.5 cubits), and presuming the sockets were the same width and half the length (since there were two per beam), it is clear that they were hollow in order to receive the tendons of the beams. If the dimensions were 1x1x1.5 cubits, the walls of the sockets would have been approximately .9 cm thick. Rashi taught that they were 1/4 cubit thick, which would mean that the walls of the socket would also need to be hollow, for solid walls 1/4 cubit thick would result in the base weighing nine talents (or 1382 lbs.).