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Animal Skins on the Sanctuary

26:7-14 and 36:14-19

Animal skins on the Sanctuary DIG: What were the three last coverings made of? Why were they needed? What was the difference in their different lengths? In their durability? What is generally associated with goats in the Scriptures? Why were the ram skins dyed red?

REFLECT: If you could design and build a special place where you could feel close to God, what would it look like? How big would it be? How would you furnish it? What would be the focal point?



Each of the remaining three coverings for **the Sanctuary** had its own symbolic meaning. Over the white **curtains** of **twisted linen** hung **eleven curtains** made of **goat hair**. **The goat's hair foreshadowed Christ's death on the cross.** They were all **to be the same size - thirty cubits**, or forty-five feet **wide and four cubits**, or six feet **long**. Each set was thirty feet **long** by forty-five feet **wide**. When the two sets were woven together by the **women (36:26)**, they were sixty feet **long** and forty-five feet **wide**. They were **longer on both sides** than the inner white linen **curtains** (45 feet rather than 42 feet), so they could touch the ground **on both sides of the Sanctuary (26:7-8, 13, 36:14-15)**. The length of **the Sanctuary** was the same as the **curtains of goat hair** that covered it, or sixty feet, leaving the entrance for the outer veil. This hid from view the brilliant colors on the white **curtains** and protected the costly pieces of gold furniture.⁵⁶² Therefore,

just as **God** *tabernacled* in **human skin** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click [Af](#) - The Memra of God**), **He** also *tabernacled* in **animal skin**.

In connection with many of Isra'el's great feasts, when the people were collectively represented before **God**, *the goat* was the only animal to be sacrificed for sin. Isra'el's calendar year began with the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. During the seven days of these feasts (among other sacrifices), a *goat* was slain for a sin offering (**Numbers 28:17-22**). The next feast was Weeks. We should not be surprised that a *goat* was offered as a sin offering there as well (**Leviticus 23:15-19**). Then came the feast of Trumpets, and there also *the goat* for a sin offering was used (**Numbers 29:1-5**). Following this came the most solemn of them all, the Day of Atonement, where a special sin offering was made of *two goats*. One of the goats was slain and the other led out into the desert after the sins of the nation were symbolically transferred to it (**Leviticus 16**). Finally came the Feast of Tabernacles, the feast of ingathering, when Israel rested from their toil and rejoiced in the blessing of **God** upon their labors. This feast lasted for eight days and *on each day*, a *goat* was slain as a sin offering (**Numbers 29**).

In addition, it is very striking to find that *the goat* generally depicts evildoing. Rebekah placed **goatskins** upon Jacob's hands and neck to deceive Isaac (**Genesis 27:16**). Joseph's brothers **slaughtered a goat and dipped his robe in the blood** to deceive their father (**Genesis 37:31**). **Michal** deceived Saul by putting an idol on his bed and putting some **goats' hair at the head** (**First Samuel 19:13**). And finally, **Jesus**, contrasts the saved of **His** flock, **the sheep**, to the wicked lost, or **the goats** (see my commentary on **Revelation [Fc](#) - The Sheep and the Goats**).⁵⁶³

Five of the curtains were joined **together into one set and the other six into another set**. The **sixth curtain** was folded **double at the front**, covering the outer veil. **Fifty loops** were made **along the edge of the end curtain in one set and also along the edge of the end curtain in the other set**. **Fifty bronze clasps** then fastened **the tent together as a unit**. **Unlike the gold clasps for the inner white curtains, those clasps of the outer coverings were made of bronze**. This is significant because **bronze** symbolized divine judgment. So when **Jesus** became sin on our behalf, **He** suffered the wrath of **God** (**Isaiah 53:10; Zechariah 13:7; Second Corinthians 5:21; First Peter 2:24**). **As for the additional length of the curtains**, six feet of the woven **curtain that was left over was to hang down at the rear of the Sanctuary** leaving a

clearance for the outer veil in the front (**26:9-12, 36:16-18**).

The last two external coverings of **the Sanctuary** give us two very different views of **Christ** and **His** ministry here on earth. They show how **He** was viewed from **God's** perspective and from man's perspective. **The ram skins dyed red, pictured Christ's devotion and obedience as seen by ADONAI.** Over the **curtains** of **goat hair** there was a **covering of ram skins dyed red (26:14a)**. The **ram** was the sacrifice used in the ordination of the priest when he began his ministry (**29:26**). *It spoke, therefore, of devotedness to God.* It was a **ram** that took the place of Isaac when Abraham **bound** his son **and laid him on the altar (Genesis 22:13)**. Likewise, **Christ** was perfectly devoted to **ADONAI** and was always about **His Father's** business (**Luke 2:49; John 9:4**). **Zeal for His Father's** name consumed **Him (John 2:17)**. So the **ram skins dyed red** pointed to the blood of **Christ**. **He** laid down **His** life willingly in obedience to **the Father's** command (**John 10:18**). At the cross, mankind only saw the execution of a condemned criminal, but heaven looked down and saw the unequalled devotion and obedience of **the Son to His** heavenly **Father**.⁵⁶⁴

*During the last three hours on the cross (from noon until three o'clock), when **ADONAI** poured out **His** wrath on **Christ**, darkness came over the whole land and the sun stopped shining (Mark 15:33; Luke 24:44-45). The word for the whole land means the whole inhabited earth. Therefore, the blackness of the whole inhabited earth was as black as the curtains of goat hair covering the Sanctuary that symbolized Christ's death.*

The hides of sea cows symbolized Christ as He appeared before men. On top of the **ram skins**, visible to those in the courtyard or in the camp of Isra'el, there was a **covering of hides of sea cows (26:14b, 36:19)**. The *dugong*, or **sea cow**, feeds on herbs or other vegetable matter. It grows to about ten to twelve feet long, and has a round head and divided tail. It is often found among the coral rocks of the Red Sea.⁵⁶⁵ Those strong, durable **hides** protected the other coverings, and the furniture inside **the Sanctuary** from sun and rain, from dew and desert sand. These **hides** alone would be seen by the eyes of men as Isra'el traveled in the wilderness. It points to the fact that **Christ made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant (Philippians 2:7)**. Born in a manger; brought up in despised Nazareth; working at the carpenter's bench; these were examples of what the rough and unattractive **hides of sea cows** foreshadowed. **He** humbled **Himself** and **His** divine glory was hidden from the eyes of sinful mankind. When those who looked down on **Him** said: **Isn't this the carpenter's son (Mark 6:3)**,

it merely showed the contempt they had for **Him**. They could not see the spiritual grace or the heavenly beauty that lay beneath. When they said: **As for this fellow, we don't even know where He comes from (John 9:29)**, it revealed the fact that they saw only the **hides of sea cows**.

It was the same at the time of **His** death. Just as the desert tribes passed by **the Sanctuary** not seeing the beautiful white linen **curtains** underneath, so the morbid throngs at the cross did not understand what they were witnessing. Many were astonished when they saw **Christ**, because **His appearance was so disfigured** that it didn't look like **any man, His form marred beyond human likeness (Isaiah 52:14)**. They viewed **Him** as utterly helpless, unable to come down from the cross. When they said: **He saved others but He can't save Himself (Mark 15:31b)**, it revealed that they only saw the **hides of sea cows**.

It is very interesting to realize that, in sharp contrast from the ten white linen **curtains** and the **eleven** black **curtains** made of goat's **hair**, *no dimensions were given for the two outer coverings*. This can only mean that what they symbolized was beyond measure. There was a depth and a height both in **Christ's** devotedness to **ADONAI** and in **His** humiliation before men that was, and is, completely impossible for us to estimate.⁵⁶⁶