

#4: Manatees, Multi-colored Squirrels, and Unicorns: Intro to the Septuagint & Talmud

- NIV:* 6 Then they are to cover this with **hides of sea cows**, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place.
- NASB:* 6 and they shall lay a covering of **porpoise skin** on it, and shall spread over it a cloth of pure blue, and shall insert its poles.
- Message:* Then they are to cover this with a **dolphin skin**, spread a solid blue cloth on top, and insert the poles.
- ASV:* 6 and shall put thereon a covering of **sealskin**, and shall spread over it a cloth all of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof.
- KJV:* 6 And shall put thereon the covering of **badgers' skins**, and shall spread over it a cloth wholly of blue, and shall put in the staves thereof.
- ESV:* 6 Then they shall put on it a covering of **goatskin** and spread on top of that a cloth all of blue, and shall put in its poles.
- CEV:* 6 and then with a piece of **fine leather**, and cover it all with a solid blue cloth. After this they will put the carrying poles in place.
- TNIV:* 6 Then they are to cover the curtain with a **durable leather**, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place.

- How do you personally feel about each of these translations in general?
- Which English translations do you find to be unlikely for this passage of Scripture? Why?
- Which English translations do you find more likely for this passage of Scripture? Why?

The Hebrew Language (Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon)

For reference, here's is the entry for the term in question:

תחש

“tachash”

A kind of leather or skin, and perhaps the animal yielding it (probably the dugong, compare Arabic *tukhas* dolphin; Assyrian *tachsu* sheep; Egyptian *tehas* leather).

- Which English translations would you now consider unlikely? More likely?

The Other Time *Tachash* Is Used in the Bible

The word, “*tachash*” is hard to define because historically, the use of the word largely died when the Tent of Meeting was rendered obsolete with the establishment of the Temple in Jerusalem (10th/9th century BC). For the most part, *tachash* was only used to cover parts of the Tent of Meeting. So, when they no longer had the Tent of Meeting, they stopped using the *tachash* coverings, and hence stopped using the word *tachash*.

There is only one occasion when *tachash* is used in the Old Testament without relation to the Tent of Meeting. Ezekiel 16:10:

10 I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put sandals [of tachash] on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. - NIV

- What insight does Ezekiel 16:10 give with regards to the OT understanding of *tachash*?
- Which of the English translations allow for Ezekiel 16:10's understanding of *tachash* as well?
- Which of the English translations are likely eliminated when you include Ezekiel 16:10 into the picture?

The Septuagint

The Septuagint is a 2nd century BC Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Septuagint is significant for our study today because it gives us another reference point for defining *tachash*. The Brown-Driver-Briggs dictionary that we used earlier uses similar sounding words from other cultures (Arabic/Assyrian/Egyptian) to help define *tachash*. The Septuagint, however, gives us a look into a Jewish person's understanding of what *tachash* meant, though it is written in Greek and several centuries after the Tent of Meeting was used.

καὶ	ἐπιθήσουσιν	ἐπ'	αὐτὸ	κατακάλυμμα	δέρμα ὑακίνθινον	καὶ	ἐπιβαλοῦσιν
and	they shall place	upon	it	overcovering	a skin of blue.	And	they shall put
ἐπ'	αὐτὴν	ἱμάτιον	ὅλον	ὑακίνθινον	ἄνωθεν	καὶ	διεμβалоῦσιν
upon	it	a garment	entirely	of blue	from above.	And	they shall insert
τοὺς	ἀναφορεῖς						
the	bearing poles.						

- Could the Septuagint's definition of *tachash* fit in the context of Numbers 4 and Ezekiel 16:10?

The Talmud

The Talmud is a written record of Jewish teaching on the Old Testament, compiled in the 2nd century AD. Basically, it was an anthology (sorted by topic) of the best sermons and commentaries through history until that point in time.

Like the Septuagint, the Talmud gives us yet another reference point for defining *tachash*. As a historical Jewish commentary it gives us a glimpse into how respected teachers within the Jewish culture explained things in the Old Testament that may be confusing (like the definition of *tachash*).

*Said Rabbi Elai in the name of Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish, Rabbi Meir used to maintain, The **tachash** of Moses' day was a separate species, and the Sages could not decide whether it belonged to the genus of wild beasts or to the genus of domestic animals; and it had one horn in its forehead, and it came to Moses' hand [providentially] just for the occasion, and he made the [covering of the] Tabernacle, and then it was hidden.*

- How does Rabbi Elai understand *tachash*?
- To what degree would you favor Rabbi Elai's explanation of *tachash*?

*Rabbi Abba objected: Rabbi Judah said: There were two coverings, one of dyed rams' skins, and one of **tahash** skins. Rabbi Nehemiah said: There was one covering and it was like a squirrel[']s]. But the squirrel is unclean!-This is its meaning: like a squirrel[']s], which has many colours, yet not [actually] the squirrel, for that is unclean, whilst here a clean [animal is meant].*

- In the rabbis' attempts to define *tachash*, what two criteria does they set?

Going Back to Leviticus

Considering Rabbi Abba's two criteria, read Leviticus 11:1-12.

- Based on your knowledge of taxonomy and understanding of Leviticus 11:1-12, which definitions of *tachash* are unlikely?
- In light of all this, how would you define *tachash*? Why?
- How does translation/interpretation color your understanding of Scripture?