

Introductory Remarks

Quotes are from NRSV unless indicated otherwise. Highlighting by underlining is mine.

The tables are not just lists of terms. Each table addresses certain difficulties.

Table: “Terms for the Sanctuary itself”

This table is meant to facilitate the decision-making on some key terms. The sanctuary terms are an example for how, on the one hand, a term can be used for more than one object, and on the other hand, the same object can be given different names – both of which can pose challenges in translation.

The table gives an idea of the task that is before the team, and can prevent from making decisions on isolated terms – which would likely have to be revised later.

For example, it could be helpful, when looking for a term for ‘sanctuary’ (*miqdāš*), to keep in mind that another term will be needed for the ‘Holy Place’ (*qōdeš*) – which is derived from the same root in Hebrew. Also, when the team is working on Exodus and is looking for a word for *miškān* – which then refers to the Tabernacle – it is good to keep in mind that later the same word needs to be applicable to the Temple.

The most important terms where there is overlap in meaning are:

- Tent of Meeting
- Dwelling (traditionally ‘Tabernacle’)
- Sanctuary
- House of God / Temple

The translation for ‘**Tent of meeting**’ should not suggest that it was people meeting there. It was the tent where Moses met with the LORD.¹ Ex 29:42ff. say:

⁴² ... at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. ⁴³ I will meet with the Israelites there, and it shall be sanctified by my glory; ... ⁴⁵ I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God.

It is important to find a good word for *miškān* (traditionally ‘Tabernacle’), which expresses that God “lives” there.

Ex 25:8-9: And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell (*škn*) among them. In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle (*miškān*) and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

Ex 26:7 shows a rarer usage of the tent terms: The ‘tent’ (*ōhel*) [= second layer] covers the ‘dwelling’ (*miškān*) [= first layer]. But then in Ex 39:32 it is the other way round; it speaks of the *miškān* *ōhel* *mō’ēd* – the ‘dwelling of the Tent of meeting’: There, the *miškān* is the whole Tent, built over the essential inner part, the ‘Tent of meeting’.

The terms for the Tabernacle are, on rare occasions, used for the whole Tabernacle including its courtyard. In a functional approach to translation, this needs to be taken into consideration in order to avoid confusion on the side of the readers. Usually, tent and courtyard are distinct. See Lev 6:9: “In the court of the tent of meeting they shall eat it.” But there are exceptions, see table.²

¹ HALOT’s gloss “..., better, tent for assembly[!], meeting” is a bit of a mis-translation of the German original.

² The cases in Lev 8 and 9 need careful analysis. Reading of “all the people” being assembled makes one think of the place outside the courtyard; but it could be that just the elders as representatives are in view, and stood inside the courtyard.

An equivalent for the English word ‘**temple**’ is not very much in use in the OT. The normal way of referring to it is ‘house’(*bayit*), or ‘house of the LORD / of God’; *hêkāl* does not occur all that often, and when it does, it sometimes means just the main room. Probably, in many languages, it will be sufficient to use the same term for both *bayit* and *hêkāl* – either an equivalent of ‘House (of God)’, or a specific term for ‘temple’.

In 1Ch 9:19-23, the Chronicler applies Tent terminology to the Temple, in order to show the continuity between both.

Finally, the table can help to recognize exceptions as such. For example, if translating the phrase ‘Dwelling of the Tent of Meeting’ is problematic, it is good to know that this only occurs five times in the 39 books.

Praise be to Jesus, who “made his dwelling among us” (John 1,14 NIV),
and who is “greater than the Temple” (Matthew 12:6 NIV)!

Table: “The Four Tabernacle Coverings”

Firstly, this table summarizes the essential information that is needed to understand the make-up of the Holy Tent with its four tent coverings of different materials. Secondly, it shows that the same Hebrew term is used for the first and the second layer; and another term is used for both the third and the fourth layer. Finally, the first and the second layer can sometimes be called by names that are usually used for the whole Tent.

Table: “The Curtains of the Tabernacle”

Again, one term (i.e. *māsāk*) is used for different objects, and the same object (i.e. the curtain between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place) has more than one name. Among the questions that translators need to deal with is this: Shall this curtain always be called by the same name? Another question touches on the criteria for the word choices: Should the names in the receptor language reflect the underlying idea (in which case ‘veil’ is attractive), or should it follow the most common usage (in which case ‘curtain’ is the more likely choice).

Table: “The ‘Equipment’ (כֵּלִי *kʾlî*) of the Tabernacle”

The Hebrew word כֵּלִי *kʾlî* – very broad anyway – can refer to the major parts (the furnishings) and to the minor equipment (utensils) of the Tabernacle. If the target language has a rich enough vocabulary, one should not always just say ‘equipment’. This sounds unspecific and does not help clarity. For the most part, it is quite clear what those pieces of equipment were. The table gives an overview of the different usages of *kʾlî*. That should help to choose appropriate terms in the different places.

In a few places, identifying the *kʾlî* is a matter of interpretation.

Table: “Materials & techniques used in the construction of the Temple”

This table is simply meant to provide an overview, so the translator does not lose track of where the same material was used, and where different materials were used. Unfortunately, some uncertainties in the interpretation of the text remain. Anyhow, some differentiations to be made concern the types of wood, the motifs of the carvings, the distinction between ‘gold’ and ‘pure gold’, and the ways the gold was applied.