DISCOVERY GUIDE
6 LESSONS FOR GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS

WITH ALL YOUR HEART

Being God's Presence to Our World

THAT THE WORLD MAY KNOW®

EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT
with Ray Vander Laan

BUILD ME A SANCTUARY

God's story in the Bible is framed by his desire to live with his beloved people. The story begins in a garden paradise where God walked with his people. It ends in a garden where God's people will live with him forever.

Between these scenes is human history — a story of sin, death, and the resulting broken relationship between God and his created people. But intertwined in human history is the story of God's love and his tireless work to restore that broken relationship. The enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt, their miraculous deliverance, and their exodus to the Promised Land play a pivotal role in the ongoing restoration of God's relationship with his people.

When the Hebrews walked into the desert of Sinai after crossing the Red Sea, they were at last free from enslavement in Egypt. They were not, however, free from bondage to the beliefs and ways of life they had learned in Egypt. That, in fact, was why God led them into the desert: to test them in order to know what was in their hearts and to teach them to obey his every word (Deuteronomy 8:2 – 3).

In the unknown chaos of the desert they faced hardship and uncertainty. As they walked the difficult path set out before them, they grumbled and at times even questioned God's presence with them. But when they arrived at Mount Sinai, God revealed himself to his people in a new way. In a cloud of glory, darkness, thunder, fire, and lightning, he descended onto the mountain and spoke. He expressed his unending love for them. He promised that if they would live by his every word he would live among them as their loving husband.

Imagine the joy the Israelites felt as they experienced the intimacy of God's presence with them and grew in their relationship with him. Imagine their amazement when God said that he would continue to accompany them on their journey to the Promised Land. No longer would God appear occasionally to a few individuals like the patriarchs and Moses; he would live among them!

To help the Israelites understand the depth of his commitment to live with them and to help them remember that he was present among them, God instructed them to build the tabernacle, a sanctuary for him. The tabernacle was a portable tent shrine that the Israelites would have recognized from the use of such shrines in Egyptian culture. As a familiar cultural form, the tabernacle conveyed a meaningful message that they understood immediately. It was a visual, physical reminder that the sovereign Lord of the universe was with them.

Through the design, construction, and function of the tabernacle, God revealed himself to be unlike any gods his people had known. This study will focus on the purpose, awe, and comfort that the tabernacle — as a symbol of God's constant presence — provided for the Israelites. And it will help those of us who follow Jesus today to better comprehend what it means for us to be the place where God's presence resides.

Opening Thoughts (3 minutes)

The Very Words of God

> *Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.*
>
> ***Exodus 25:8***

Think About it

All of us experience pivotal moments in life when we see as we have never seen before. These moments have the potential to change our lives — what we do, how we see the world, even who we are.

But what happens when these great moments are a few months or years behind us? What keeps these moments alive in our hearts and minds so they continue to make a difference in our lives?

DVD notes (21 minutes)

How to keep Sinai alive

The Hathor shrine at Timnah

The message of Abu Simbel

God uses the culture to convey his message

DVD Discussion (7 minutes)

1. What are you beginning to discover about the events at Mount Sinai and their long-term significance in the lives of the Israelites? In God's ongoing plan of redemption? In your life?

2. As you viewed the Egyptian temple at Timnah and the temple and battle scene carving at Abu Simbel, what sense did you gain of the importance of the message these structures conveyed to ancient people?

   Why do you think God chose these physical images, and do you think they were an effective way to communicate to people in ancient times?

3. Briefly review the Israelites' experience with God at Mount Sinai. Which aspects of that experience are essential to actually living out the kind of relationship with God that he offers?

PROFILE OF A CULTURE

The Mining Settlement at Timnah

Located in the Great Rift Valley between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba, Timnah is believed to be one of the first major mining areas in the world. The mines there produced copper, which was combined with tin to make bronze, the most valuable metal of the time. Copper production in the area peaked between the 14th and 12th centuries BC, which was roughly the time of the exodus. Copper is still mined in this region.

The Egyptians brought slaves to work the mines and smelting furnaces of Timnah. The workers dug shafts into the ground and then excavated large galleries to mine the copper. Footholds dug into the rock shafts provided access to the galleries — some as deep as thirty meters — that made up one of the most complex tunnel systems of the time. The refined copper was transported to cities along the Nile River.

EVIDENCE OF EGYPTIAN GODS: THE HATHOR SHRINE AT TIMNAH

The temple, or tent shrine, to Hathor at Timnah is evidence of Egyptian influence — where there were Egyptians, there were Egyptian gods. Like other Egyptian temples, the structure has an outer court, inner court, and holy of holies. In the cliff face above the shrine, Pharaoh is depicted bestowing an offering of *ma'at* (indicating that he had maintained harmony in the universe) to Hathor who was known as the protector of miners. As Egyptian power and influence declined in the region, the shrine became a Midianite tent shrine that was similar in design to the biblical tabernacle.

4. Using the map below, locate the cities along the Nile River from Abu Simbel to Goshen, then locate the Sinai Peninsula, the region of Jebel Musa (the traditional Mount Sinai), and Timnah. How far is it from Abu Simbel to Timnah, and what does this tell you about the influence of Egyptian culture in the world of the Israelites?

In light of the vast expanse of Egyptian influence (and with it the influence of Egyptian gods), what are your thoughts about God's desire to live among his people and the way in which he chose to express his presence with them?

Small Group Bible Discovery and Discussion (22 minutes)

The Tabernacle: A Way to Remember Sinai

The centuries-long experience of God's people in Egypt — first as foreigners, then as slaves — had shaped the Hebrews into a people who still maintained aspects of their own religious culture but in other ways had become thoroughly immersed in the religious culture of Egypt. This is not in any way a statement of blame. After all, for four hundred years the Hebrews had been bombarded by Egypt's story that was played out in the rhythm of daily life along the Nile River and surrounded them in the portrayal of Egypt's deities and Pharaohs carved into the great monuments.

Certainly God would have to act with power and drama to gain the attention of the Hebrews and teach them how to live as his chosen people in the Promised Land. And he did! The plagues, the Passover, the crossing of the sea, miracles of water and manna as the Hebrews traveled toward Mount Sinai — all demonstrated the person and character of their God. And then they camped at Mount Sinai, the capstone experience of God's revelation of himself to them.

What would happen next? How would God's people know and remember him — not just on the journey to the Promised Land but forever? Let's see where the tabernacle fits into the story and consider how it was designed to be a sanctuary for God where his presence would live among his people as an ever-present reminder of his revelation at Mount Sinai.

1. God intended far more for his people than simply ending their suffering at the hands of the Egyptians. What did he say he would do for them, and how did he describe the future relationship he wanted with them? (See Exodus 6:6–8.)

2. During their time of bondage in Egypt, the Hebrew people became discouraged and in some ways lost sight of who their God was (Exodus 6:9). What did they discover about their God through the plagues, the Passover, their departure from Egypt, and their deliverance from Pharaoh's pursuing army at the sea? (See Exodus 14:30 – 15:18.)

   What impact did their newly acquired knowledge of God have on their hearts?

   What picture of hope and their future relationship with God do you see starting to form in the minds and hearts of the Hebrews?

3. After about forty days in the desert wilderness, where God had provided for them and protected them, the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai. What was God's message and promise to them when they arrived at the mountain? (See Exodus 19:3 – 8.)

   How did the people respond?

   To what extent do you think they understood the kind of relationship God desired to have with them?

4. When God descended on Mount Sinai to meet with his people, it was an experience like no other! What were the physical and sensory manifestations of God's presence? (See Exodus 19:16 – 19; 20:18 – 21. You might want to list them!)

   How did the people respond to God's holy presence?

   How might this experience have influenced their faith and commitment to do "everything the LORD has said" (19:8)?

   What do you think it would have been like to have stood at the foot of the mountain with them?

5. How long do you think the experience of God's appearance at Mount Sinai impacted the faith commitment of the Israelites? (See Exodus 32:1.)

   In what ways does this help you understand God's command to build a sanctuary where his presence would live among his people always?

   How would the tabernacle and its design have helped the Hebrews remember their experiences at Mount Sinai?

Why do you think it would be important for God's people to be able to take the Sinai experience — the awe-filled memory of God's glory, the power of his presence, and the fire of an intimate relationship with the God of the universe — with them into the Promised Land?

THINK ABOUT IT

As a reminder, a sensory echo of the Mount Sinai experience, the tabernacle provided a way for the Israelites to take with them the memory of how God met them at his mountain in the desert. Consider the parallel characteristics of Mount Sinai and the tabernacle, each of which was a sanctuary for God's presence.

Mount Sinai	The Tabernacle
The people consecrated themselves and assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai. Limits were established to keep them from going up or even touching the mountain. The penalty for disobedience was death (Ex. 19:9–22).	The people could gather in the outer court where they could bring offerings to be made at the altar (Ex. 27:9–19).
At God's invitation, the priests, elders, and Moses went partway up the mountain to eat and drink in the presence of God (Ex. 24: 1–11).	Only Aaron and his fellow Levites were allowed to enter the holy place of the sanctuary to perform the duties God commanded. Anyone else was to be put to death (Num. 8:19–22; 18:1–7).
When the cloud of God's glory settled on Mount Sinai like a consuming fire, God called Moses to come up into the cloud to meet with him (Ex. 24:12–18).	In the holy of holies (Most Holy Place), a cloud of incense filled the space where the ark of the covenant was placed. Only Moses could enter and meet with God. Later, only the high priest could enter to fulfill his duties on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:1–2, 13, 29–34; Num. 7:89).

in THiS ARTiST'S REn DERin G Of GOD MEETin G WiTH HiS pEOpLE AT MOu n T Sin Ai, WE CAn En ViSiOn THE THREE LEVELS Of HOLin ESS REpRESEn TED: THE pEOpLE AT THE f OOT Of THE MOu n TAin ; THE pRiESTS, ELDERS, An D MOSES pARTWAy u p THE MOu n TAin ; An D MOSES ASCEn Din G in TO THE CLOu D AT THE Su MMiT.

f aith Lesson (6 minutes)

Shortly before the Israelites were finally to take possession of the Promised Land, Moses cautioned them to "watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live" (Deuteronomy 4:9). For Israel, the tabernacle that God commanded them to build as a sanctuary for his presence was part of their watching and remembering. The tabernacle helped to keep alive in their hearts the fire of meeting God at Mount Sinai.

1. What do you think God wants his followers today to do with the powerful memories of their experience with him?

What makes it more difficult for you to do this? What makes it easier?

2. If you have had a profound experience of the presence of God in your life, in the life of someone you know, or in the life of your faith community, what was it like, and how did you respond?

   In what way(s) did that experience give you a new sense of God's great power, holiness, and love?

   What desires and responses did that experience inspire in your relationship with God?

   What is your commitment to keep the memory of that experience alive in your heart, and how much work are you willing to put into taking the memory of that experience with you everywhere you go?

3. Which specific images, experiences, or words of the Bible help you to recognize God's presence in your life?

In what ways do these heighten your awareness of God and intimacy in your relationship with him?

Closing (1 minute)

Read Deuteronomy 4:9 – 10 aloud together: "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, 'Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.' "

Then pray, asking God to make you more aware of his presence with you always. Ask him to help you remember him, know him, and worship him with your whole heart every day of your life.

Memorize

> *Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children."*
>
> ***Deuteronomy 4:9 – 10***

Learning to Live by the Word and Heart of God

In-Depth Personal Study Sessions

Day One | The Tabernacle: A Practice Rooted in Culture

The Very Words of God

> *Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the* Lord *filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the* Lord *filled the tabernacle.*
>
> ***Exodus 40:34 – 35***

Bible Discovery

Why God Chose a Tabernacle

God has always wanted to live in intimate relationship with his people and throughout history has worked to restore his presence with them. When the time came for him actually to live among his chosen people all the time, God communicated his desire to be with them through images and customs with which they already were familiar. He chose the visible, tangible symbol of the tabernacle, its furnishings, and its ritual to reveal his presence to his people.

Although we may need to devote some study to understanding God's desire as expressed through the tabernacle, it made perfect sense to the Israelites. God was communicating in a "language" they understood. Through the familiar metaphor of the tabernacle and the cultural practices that God reclaimed from pagan practices, the Israelites discovered how God was unlike all other gods they had known. They began to understand the relationship he desired to have with them.

1. What is the tabernacle called in Exodus 26:36?

Scholars have learned that as early as about 2000 BC Egyptian armies on the move would take a tent to use as a religious shrine. Also, the Hebrew word for "tent," *obel*, that refers to the tabernacle in this passage, is believed to be an Egyptian word used to describe the tents of nomads. As you consider this historical and cultural background, what thoughts do you have about the way God chose to represent himself to his people during their journey to the Promised Land?

What connections do you think God may have wanted his people to make regarding their relationship with him and what he was accomplishing through them?

DID YOU KNOW?

A Long History of Tent Shrines

The relief of Ramses' war camp at the battle of Kadesh that is carved into the temple wall at Abu Simbel shows remarkable similarities to the design of the tabernacle. The basic structure comprises a two-chambered tent within a larger, rectangular, fenced enclosure that faces east. The smaller of the tent chambers is depicted as the throne room or residing place of the Pharaoh. Similar encampment and tent sanctuary designs are depicted in other Egyptian records.

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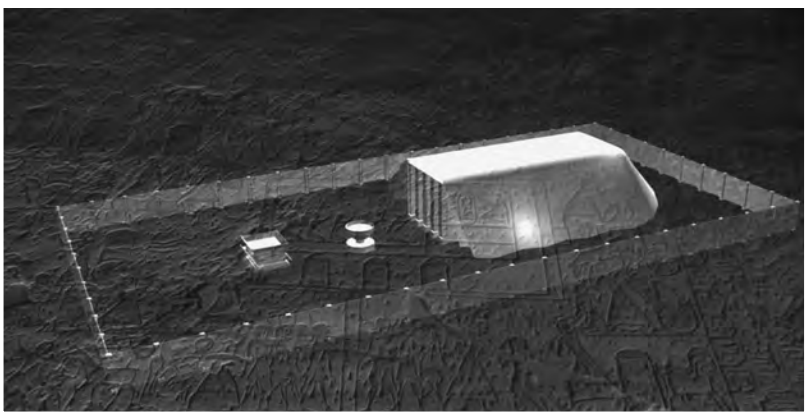

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The tomb of Hetepheres (approximately 1600 BC), wife of Sneferu and mother of Cheops (the builder of the Great Pyramid), contained a gilded wood frame covered by curtains that was assembled much like the sanctuary.

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Tutankhamen's tomb (approximately 1350 BC) contained a shrine covered by linen cloth that was divided into two parts in a manner similar to that of the tabernacle.

The tent shrine to Hathor located at Timnah was originally built by Seti I (1318–1304 BC), but was intentionally destroyed by others. Egyptians repaired it but eventually abandoned it. More than a century later, the Midianites used it as a tent sanctuary for the worship of their gods.

To this day, some Bedouin nomads in the Middle East carry with them a tent-like structure made of thin boards with a tent on top. Fastened to the saddle of a camel, the structure represents the presence of Allah wherever it goes.

2. In addition to using a culturally familiar design for the tabernacle structure, God also incorporated other cultural icons into the tabernacle furnishings and rituals to help reveal himself and convey to his people the kind of relationship he desired to have with them. Consider some of these elements and how God reclaimed them from their traditional pagan use to communicate his message.

   a. Ancient pagan worshipers made **sacrifices** of the finest foods in order to placate their gods so that the gods would view them with favor. Read Exodus 13:1, Leviticus 23:9–14, and Nehemiah 10:35, noting how God commanded his people to sacrifice to him. How is what God asked his people to do similar to and different from what pagan people believed their gods demanded?

      What do you think God wanted to communicate through the sacrifices he required? (See Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 10:26.)

b. Many ancient cultures had protective creatures, similar to **cherubim,** that possessed human, animal, or bird-like features and were often depicted in association with the gods. With what are cherubim identified in the Bible, and what do you think the cherubim sculpted on the cover of the ark of the covenant communicated about God to his people? (See Genesis 3:23–24; Exodus 25:17–22; Psalm 80:1; Revelation 4:2–11.)

c. In Egypt, priests conducted daily **incense** rituals intended to purify the image of the god and to persuade the god to enter the image. In contrast, what did incense provide in relationship to the presence of God? (See Leviticus 16:1–2, 12–13.)

d. In pagan belief, **idols** are representations of, or residing places for, the gods. As such, the idol is believed to take on the characteristics, abilities, persona, and power of the god it represents. Where did God say he would dwell if his people made a sanctuary for him? (See Exodus 25:8, 22.)

Did the sanctuary acquire any special power, or did God expect his people to worship it because his presence was there? Explain your answer.

What did God repeatedly teach his people about the worship of idols, and how does his presence in the tabernacle differ from what pagan people believed about idols and why they worshiped them? (See Exodus 20:3 – 6; 34:17; Deuteronomy 29:17 – 18; 32:21.)

e. The people of pagan cultures developed their own rituals regarding **access to the presence of their god(s)**. Who decided who was allowed to enter the holy of holies in the tabernacle where the presence of God lived, and under what conditions? (See Leviticus 16:1 – 2, 32 – 33.)

What do you think God was teaching his people through this requirement?

3. Early followers of Jesus also used cultural images and customs to explain God's message in a "language" their listeners would understand. In the first century AD, for example, the apostle Paul arrived in Athens to proclaim the message of Jesus to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 17:16 – 33). What cultural icon did he use as a starting point for his message? (See Acts 17:23.)

What effect do you think Paul's use of an actual altar and inscription had on his listeners?

For how long do you think Paul's listeners would have been reminded of what he told them about their "unknown god" whenever they walked past that altar?

Refle tion

Paul clearly communicated his method for revealing God to others in 1 Corinthians 9:19 – 23:

> *Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*

What specific opportunities do you think Christians today have lost because we have failed to present the message of God and his restoring love in the language and cultural metaphors people understand? (List them.)

Identify several contemporary cultural experiences, images, or customs that you think would help people understand God's story as told in the Bible. For instance, what might you use to illustrate:

God's desire for relationship with individual people?

The reality of sin?

The true character of God?

The sacrificial love of Jesus?

The kind of life God desires his people to live?

In following Paul's example, who in your culture do you think you need to "become" like in order to better communicate God's story to people who do not know him?

What are the risks of adapting to the cultural icons rather than adapting the icons to God's message, and what can you do to guard against this?

What are the risks of misrepresenting God as you communicate through the icons of culture, and how will you keep his message pure?

Day Two | The Tabernacle: God Comes to Live Among His People

The Very Words of God

> *I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the* Lord *their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the* Lord *their God.*
>
> ***Exodus 29:45 – 46***

Bible Discovery

Getting to Know God in a New Way

When the Hebrews left Egypt, they were well acquainted with its gods. After all, the Hebrews had spent their entire lives surrounded by the stories of Egypt's pharaohs and deities portrayed on temples, tombs, and monuments. So when the God of the Hebrews took them out of Egypt and into the desert, how would they get to know him? They had heard that their God appeared to the patriarchs, and Moses told them that God had spoken to him, but how would *they* encounter their God? How would *they* come to know God's story and participate in his plan to reclaim his world? The tabernacle represented a new chapter in God's unfolding story — a significant change in how he revealed himself to his people.

1. Consider how God's people had encountered God's presence before the tabernacle was built. When and where had God made his presence known to individual people? (See Genesis 12:6 – 7; 28:10 – 17; Exodus 3:1 – 6; 19:3, 17 – 20.)

   Do you think most of the Hebrews expected God to appear to them? Why or why not?

2. While the Hebrews were still in Egypt, God began making himself known to them. From the miracles of the plagues to his protection and deliverance from Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea to his provision of manna, God's mighty acts demonstrated his love and desire for a relationship with his people. At Mount Sinai, God expressed to Moses the kind of relationship he desired to have with his people (Exodus 19:3 – 23:33).

   a. When Moses told the people everything God had said about how they were to live in relationship with him, how did they respond? (See Exodus 24:3.)

   b. What kind of a relationship did God then establish with them? (See Exodus 24:4 – 8.)

3. After the Israelites confirmed their relationship with God, what did he command them to build, and why? (See Exodus 25:8.)

   Had God ever lived among his people in this way previously?

   What was God's purpose for living among them, and how did this fit into his great plan to reclaim his world from the chaos of sin? (See Exodus 19:5 – 6; 29:45 – 46.)

The Israelites had come out of a culture where they lived in the midst of images of Egyptian gods. It was customary to appease and honor the Egyptian gods but not to have what could be called a "relationship" with them. What do you think the Israelites might have thought when they realized that their God actually wanted to live *with* them and be *known by* them?

PROFILE OF A PEOPLE

Cultures in Contrast

While Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving from God the stone tablets of the covenant, the Israelites struggled to live by the word of God rather than by what they had "set their eyes on" in Egypt. Their doublemindedness led to a crisis in the camp (Exodus 32:1–3). Moses was focused on how they would build a sanctuary, a holy place where their invisible God could live with them so they could get to know him and his ways. At the same time, Aaron was making a golden calf so that the Israelites could focus on a visible god as they had done in Egypt. Consider the spiritual implications of the cultural contrasts between these two stories.

The Building of the Tabernacle	The Making of the Golden Calf
God's idea—Ex. 25:8–9; 29:45–46	Israelites' idea—Ex. 32:1–3
Made through willing offerings—Ex. 25:1–2	Made through demanded donations—Ex. 32:2–3
Well-planned, orderly process of painstaking, skilled construction—Ex. 25–31; 35–40	A hurried creation, resulting from impulsive action—Ex. 32:2–6
Priests ordained to serve and protect God's holiness—Ex. 29:1, 35–37, 44; Lev. 16:1–2	People offered sacrifices and then indulged in revelry—Ex. 32:6
Created a visible space among his people for an invisible God—Ex. 25:22	Created a visible image (idol)—Ex. 32:4

4. Getting to know God and learning to live by his word represented a significant — and difficult — change for his people. What had happened to the Hebrews while they were in Egypt that made them quick to go back to the familiar images and customs rather than responding to God with wholehearted obedience? (See Ezekiel 20:4 – 14.)

5. Where in the camp was the tabernacle always placed? (See Numbers 1:51 – 53; 2:1 – 2.)

   Why do you think God chose this location as the dwelling place for his presence?

   What do you think this location communicated to the Israelites?

6. What happened as soon as the tabernacle was finished and Moses set it up for the first time? (See Exodus 40:33 – 35.)

   What do you think the cloud of God's presence above the tabernacle communicated to the Israelites about their God and their relationship with him? (See Exodus 40:36 – 38.)

In what ways do you think the cloud of God's presence above the tabernacle was removing the influences of Egypt and training his people to trust and obey him so that they could fulfill their role in his ongoing story? (See Numbers 9:15 – 23.)

Refle tion

The message of God's relationship with his people as revealed through the tabernacle metaphor isn't just for the Hebrews. It also speaks to God's people today. God's intent is, and has always been, to share an intimate relationship among or within his people. The tabernacle portrayed this desire and assured his people of his faithful presence.

Take time to read and meditate on the following portions of the Bible. Focus your thoughts against the background of the message God communicated to the Israelites through the tabernacle, where his presence lived among them. Consider how the message of God's desire to dwell among his people speaks to you.

> *Be strong and very courageous.… Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the* Lord *your God will be with you wherever you go.*
>
> ***Joshua 1:7 – 9***

> *The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel — which means, "God with us."*
>
> ***Matthew 1:23***

> *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son*

and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew 28:16 – 20

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 2:1 – 4

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

1 Corinthians 3:16 – 17

Memorize

The cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels.

Exodus 40:38

Day Three | God Calls His People to Build the Tabernacle

The Very Words of God

Then Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the Lord had given ability and who was willing to come and do the work. They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary.

Exodus 36:2 – 3

Bible Discovery

The Community Builds for God!

The tabernacle metaphor communicated an important message to the Israelites about the kind of relationship God wanted to have with them. In a cultural language they could understand, it helped them to realize the close, intimate relationship they could enjoy with their God. But the tabernacle experience wasn't only about the Israelites' relationship with God; it also was about their relationship with one another and their identity as a community of God's people. When Moses, as God commanded, told Israel to build the tabernacle, they learned about themselves — who they were and who they could become as a community united together to accomplish God's purpose.

1. Who did God say was to build his tabernacle (also "sanctuary") and its furnishings? (See Exodus 25:1 – 2, 8 – 10.)

   What is significant about God instructing "them" to build rather than instructing only Moses, or Bezalel, or Oholiab to build?

   What would be the effect of every Israelite having contributed to the building of God's dwelling place?

2. Building the tabernacle according to God's instructions was no small job! If you read all of God's instructions for the tabernacle (Exodus 25 – 30; also 36 – 39), you will be amazed by the work it required. For now, consider just a few examples of what the community of God's people made!

Object	Quantity	Size	Material	Other Features/ Details
Curtains (Ex. 26:1 – 6)				
Frame of the tabernacle (Ex. 26:15 – 29)				
Breastpiece (Ex. 28:15 – 28)				

Imagine! Fifty of this, twenty of that. Some items of hammered gold, others overlaid in bronze. Some made of fine linen, others of animal hides. Some framed in wood, others set with precious stones. Try to imagine the variety of skills and the number of people it took — working together — to complete this task. (Handling curtains that are approximately six by forty-two feet is not a job for one person!)

a. What do you think the community of God's people discovered about themselves and their God as they came together to accomplish this beautiful work?

b. In what ways might this experience have helped to turn a group of liberated slaves into a community of people who would live for God in the Promised Land?

3. God required that the sanctuary and its furnishings be made *exactly* as he instructed (Exodus 25:9). Why do you think it was important for God's people (who would soon enter the Promised Land to live in such a way that all the world would come to know their God) to learn to follow his instructions exactly?

4. Eventually the people completed the work and presented it to Moses. Exodus 39:32 – 43 describes their presentation of the finished tabernacle.

   a. What was the result of their labor?

   b. Imagine seeing all of the parts and furnishings of the tabernacle gathered together before Moses. What sense of accomplishment, connection with God, and unity of the community do you think the people felt that day?

   c. What do you think God was impressing on the hearts of his people through this experience?

Reflection

The tabernacle in the desert has long since faded into the dust of history. Even the temple in Jerusalem no longer stands as the dwelling place of God. But God still lives within the hearts of his people, and he still desires to build up that community of obedient people who will continue his work of making him known to all the world.

Using the cultural language of the first century, Peter described the community of believers as those who, "also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

To what extent do you think God wants his people today to experience the sense of community unity and purpose

that the Israelites must have felt when Moses blessed them for their work on the tabernacle?

that Peter had in mind when he wrote of God's people being living stones in a spiritual house, a holy priesthood offering sacrifices?

Consider what binds a community of God's people together. Is it just sharing common interests or liking each other, or is it something deeper? If so, what is it?

If you ever have experienced being part of a strong community of faith, what made it work?

What work do you think God wants his community of people to join together in accomplishing today?

What do you think is essential in order for God's people to be successful in accomplishing this work as a unified community?

Memorize

So all the work on the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord *commanded Moses.… Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the* Lord *had commanded. So Moses blessed them.*

Exodus 39:32, 43

Day four | The Tabernacle: Built from the Gifts of the People

The Very Words of God

The Lord *said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give."*

Exodus 25:1 – 2

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Giving Generously to the Work of the Lord

God commanded Moses to collect valuables from the people to be used in building the tabernacle. The response of God's people is truly amazing, particularly in light of how little they really had. Remember, the Israelites had just left Egypt for good, and they had

done so in a hurry. They had no bank accounts, investments, or retirement funds. They had only the food, tools, household items, and valuables that they carried out of Egypt on foot! Would they give enough to accomplish the work God set before them?

1. While meeting with Moses on Mount Sinai, God said that he wanted his people to build a sanctuary for him. What specific thing did God ask the people do, and for what purpose? (See Exodus 25:1 – 2, 8.)

DID YOU KNOW?

The Hebrew word, *terumah*, translated in Exodus 25 as "offering," has a special meaning. It comes from a root word that means "to be exalted or lifted up" and refers to something that is set apart by its owner and dedicated to God's use.

Anything God's people freely give to him is lifted up for a higher purpose. In addition to offering material goods as *terumah*, God's people can lift up clean hands, a pure heart, their speech and voice, even their soul (Psalms 24:4; 25:1; 142:1).

2. Building the tabernacle as God's dwelling place was clearly an important part of God's unfolding story. We might think that God would command his people to give him gifts or use his authority to levy a tax in order to have the resources needed for the task. Instead, God asked for voluntary offerings. Why do you think God did this, especially since he assessed a payment to be used for maintaining the tabernacle later (Exodus 30:11 – 16)?

What do you think the opportunity, rather than obligation, to give to the Lord said to the Israelites about the kind of relationship God desired to have with them?

What do you think it said about the kind of people he wanted them to be?

3. List the specific items God asked the people to bring as offerings. (See Exodus 25:3 – 7.)

Which items, and how large a quantity of them, do you think people who had been slaves would, or would not, have had?

How had the Israelites obtained their more valuable possessions? (See Exodus 3:21 – 22; 11:2 – 3; 12:33 – 36.)

What indicates that these possessions were gifts from God? (See Genesis 15:12 – 14.)

4. When Moses finished telling the Israelites what God had said about offerings to build the tabernacle, how did the people respond? (See Exodus 35:20 – 29; 36:2 – 7.)

Reflection

> *And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning.… Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: 'No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary. And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.*
>
> ***Exodus 36:3 – 7***

Just imagine the scene — the whole community abundantly giving and joyfully working together to complete the work! Even though they were totally dependent on God to provide for their needs, they gave until Moses made them stop!

Is this the response you would have expected from them? Why or why not?

What do you think this response meant to God, and to the people themselves?

What do you think it would have meant to your walk of faith to have participated in such an experience?

In a sense, the offerings the Israelites gave were their "bank account" for starting a new life in the Promised Land. So what God had asked his people to give was a sacrifice.

Why do you think God asked so much from people who had so little? (Remember, there were no moving vans for the Israelites. They were carrying everything they owned.)

How important do you think it is for God's people today to willingly make similar sacrifices in order to participate in the work God is doing?

Which of your possessions or which aspects of your lifestyle are you willing to sacrifice to God?

What would be difficult about making that sacrifice?

How much would you have to trust God in order to do it?

Memorize

Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence, and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and brought an offering to the Lord *for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments.… And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.*

Exodus 35:20–21; 36:6–7

Day five | God Uses the Skill of His People

The Very Words of God

All who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord *has commanded.*

Exodus 35:10

Bible Discovery

Qualified to Build God's Sanctuary

Building the tabernacle required the skills of the whole community of God's people. Some tasks required people who could spin, weave, and embroider in linen, goat hair, and gold. Other tasks required people to cut and set precious stones or to construct furnishings of wood and fine metalwork. Still other tasks required people who could build wood beams and posts or had the skill of a perfumer. And all of these tasks demanded workers with the wisdom to do the work exactly as God instructed.

1. What kinds of skills were needed to complete the work of the tabernacle, and how had the men and women of Israel acquired those skills? (See Exodus 28:3; 31:1 – 11; 35:25 – 26.)

2. On which two men did God choose to bestow special abilities that were necessary for accomplishing the work of the tabernacle? (See Exodus 31:1 – 6; 35:30 – 36:1.)

   List the special qualifications God had given to Bezalel.

   List the special qualifications God had given to Oholiab.

   Which do you think were the most important skills or qualifications that God gave to these men, and why?

3. As is often the case in exploring the account of God's story played out in history, knowing something of the language, customs, or lifestyle of the people involved can give us valuable insight into the meaning and message of the Bible. Consider, for example, the two men God singled out for leadership in building the tabernacle: Bezalel and Oholiab.

   a. Which tribes were each of these men from? (See Exodus 31:1 – 6.)

   b. What were the responsibilities of their respective tribes during Israel's time in the desert? (See Numbers 10:11 – 14, 25.)

   c. When God chose men from both the leading tribe of Israel and the rear-guard tribe, what do you think he was saying about the community nature of the task he was calling his people to do?

   d. The name *Bezalel* means "in the shadow (protection) of God" and the name *Oholiab* means "the tent of the father," which implies being under the protection of the father. What insights do the meanings of these names provide regarding the important nature of their work in building the tabernacle?

e. What were these men responsible for protecting? (See Exodus 25:9.)

Reflection

It is unusual to find in one person the combination of skills that Bezalel and Oholiab each possessed. God truly did "fill" them with the abilities necessary to accomplish the task he assigned to them. But God also filled Bezalel from the tribe of Judah "with the Spirit of God" (Exodus 31:3, 35:30–31).

Why do you think God gave his Spirit (literally a "divine spirit of wisdom") to equip Bezalel for the job?

What challenges do you think Bezalel faced in leading God's people to build the tabernacle according to God's plan and standards?

What do you think would have happened if Bezalel had been lax in protecting God's plan and in meeting God's standards for the tabernacle? What if he had allowed the Israelites to change the requirements for building the tabernacle because they had other preferences or wanted to make the job easier?

There is a sense in which all of God's people are like Bezalel and Oholiab — called to build the community in which God's presence will dwell.

With which abilities has God gifted you for this task, and to what extent are you using them for that purpose?

When have you been lax in using your abilities exactly according to God's instructions or standards, and what has been the result?

In what ways do you need the wisdom of God's Spirit to help you live in such a way that you create a sanctuary — a place — for God's presence to dwell in your life? Your family? Your faith community? Your world?