

A Portable Eden

Opener: What's a place that has special meaning for you?

Scripture

The Garden of Eden. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Genesis 3:8

The Tabernacle. The Lord said to Moses, ²“Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from everyone whose heart prompts them to give. . . . ⁸“Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. ⁹Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. Exodus 25:2, 8

Detailed instructions follow in chapters 25-30 for constructing the ark, table, lampstand, curtains, altar, courtyard, oil, and priestly garments. They're also told how to consecrate the priests and what to offer on the altar and when to offer it.

In Exodus 29:42-46 God says, “For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the tent of meeting, before the Lord. There I will meet you and speak to you; ⁴³ there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory. ⁴⁴ “So I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. ⁴⁵ Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. ⁴⁶ 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.

After the tabernacle was constructed according to these instructions, Exodus 40:34 tells us, “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”

The Temple. When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. ²The priests could not enter the temple of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled it. 2 Chronicles 7:1-2

The Greater Tabernacle. When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this creation. . . he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. Hebrews 9:11-12

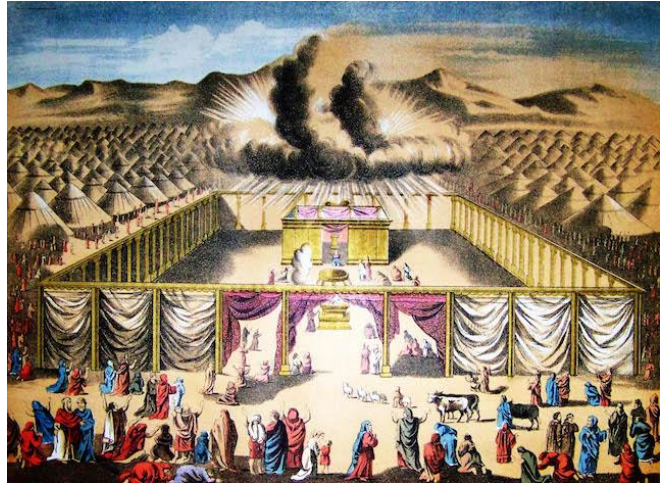
And the Word became flesh and dwelt [tabernacled¹] among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Heaven. Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” Revelation 21:1-4

¹ The word for tabernacle comes from the Hebrew word “mishkan” which means “to dwell” or “dwelling place.”

Discussion Questions

1. We often focus on people in the Bible—Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, David, etc. But now let's focus on places, specifically on the Garden of Eden, the tabernacle, and the temple. What did God provide in Eden? How did it set the stage for us to understand that He actually wants to be with us? Genesis 3:8
2. We know how that turned out, but now in Exodus 25:8 God says, "Let them construct a sanctuary for me so that I may dwell among them." He's referring to the tabernacle—a unique place set apart for Him to dwell in their midst. Why would He do that? How does it remind you of Eden? Why was it portable?
3. After 440 years, the temple² in Jerusalem superseded the tabernacle as God's dwelling place. How was the temple similar to the tabernacle? How was it different? How did it also represent what God began in Eden? 2 Chronicles 7:1-2
4. Was God's presence in the tabernacle and temple merely symbolic, or was He really there? What difference does it make? How does it prepare us for when we receive His Spirit? Exodus 40:34; 2 Chronicles 7:1-2
5. Hebrews 9:11-12 tells us that there is a "greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not made with human hands." What's that referring to? How does it amplify how important the tabernacle is to understanding God's plan? John 1:14
6. Revelation 21:3 says, "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'" From Genesis to Revelation, what is God's intention? Summarize how Eden, the tabernacle, and the temple were all part of what we'll see in heaven.



Wrap Up

God has a plan. Of course He does. But what is it? We get our first glimpse of it in the Garden of Eden—God's people dwelling in God's place with full access to His presence. Then He dwells with them in the tabernacle, in the temple, and now through Jesus. Through His life, death, and resurrection He made the way for God to not only dwell among His people, but to dwell within them through the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ made us ready and right, and then God moved in. We, along with all believers across time and place, truly are His tabernacle on the move.

² It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II in 587 BC. A second temple, built in 516 BC, was destroyed in 70 AD by the Romans.