

A Space for God

Sandra rubbed the back of her neck as she surveyed the sanctuary. Her decorating team had done a wonderful job. Flower arrangements, sheer curtains, two handmade wall-sized quilts, and an assortment of other spring décor were expertly and lovingly placed throughout the church.

The women on the team were dedicated. Two were professional event planners, two were local artists, one was a decorating consultant, and one was a student studying art and design. Sandra was a self-taught and ascribed decorator with years of work under her belt.

Sandra was happy with the expertise and passion each woman brought to the group. However, today, she noticed what seemed to be bad feelings between Dominique, the college art and design student, and long-time committee and church member Edna.

“Ladies, let’s go into the fellowship hall and close out in prayer,” said Sandra as she entered the vestibule.

Sandra told the women how pleased she was with the morning’s work. She thanked them and added what most pleases God is how the women adorn their hearts with the love of Christ.

After the prayer, Sandra observed Edna speaking to Dominique. The two women ended their conversation with smiles and a hug. “Thank you, Lord,” Sandra prayed as she locked the doors of the church. “I pray that you are pleased with us and our work today.”

1. *What do you think would make God feel comfortable or at home in your heart and life? Why or why not?*

2. *What kinds of things crowd God out of your heart and life?*

3. *What does it look like for you to represent God’s character in your world?*

Offerings for the Tabernacle

Exodus 25:1–9 KJV

1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering: of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering. 3 And this is the offering which ye shall take of them; gold, and silver, and brass, 4 And blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, 5 And rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood, 6 Oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and for sweet incense, 7 Onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate.

8 And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. 9 According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.

Exodus 25:1–9 NIV

¹ 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. ³ These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; ⁴ blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; ⁵ ram skins dyed red and another type of durable leather; acacia wood; ⁶ olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; ⁷ and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

⁸ "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. ⁹ Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

The tabernacle was a sacred space, one that the people would be able to bring along for their wilderness journey. God tells Moses to gather the people and to ask them to give items "willingly" for this purpose (v. 2 KJV). Among other things, God requests gold, silver, and precious fabrics such as colored yarn. Many items came out of Egypt, since God had caused the Egyptians to give the Hebrews gold and silver (Ex. 12:35–36).

The valuable items would make a dwelling fit for God's presence, while at the same time creating separation from the sin and disorder of the people. This would create a place where Israel could seek God's will and favor.

Offerings of metals, wood, and fabrics would construct the physical space. Most items in the tabernacle would be overlaid with gold—not just beautiful in appearance but immune to corrosion. The wood mentioned in verse 5, "acacia," is long-lasting, and it would create a durable tent structure.

The tabernacle would become central to Israel's religious life. The "ephod and breastpiece" are garments for Aaron, the high priest (v. 7). The names of all twelve tribes would be engraved on precious stones set on the priest's clothing, and Aaron would represent them when he came before God (see Ex. 28:12, 29–30). He would anoint objects with oil and burn incense.

The instructions are practical, down to the very materials. The holy God of Israel was planning to dwell with His people, and a sacred space needed to reflect the fact that the creator of the cosmos had come to dwell with a specific group of people.

4. *What motivated the Israelites to contribute materials for the construction of the tabernacle?*

5. *What was God's reason for directing the Israelites to build a tabernacle for Him?*

6. *What was the theological significance of the tabernacle for the Israelites?*

The Tabernacle and Its Curtains

Exodus 26:1, 31–37 KJV

1 Moreover thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet:

Exodus 26:1, 31–37 NIV

¹ "Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim

with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them.

31 And thou shalt make a vail of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made:

32 And thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold: their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver. 33 And thou shalt hang up the vail under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the vail the ark of the testimony: and the vail shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy. 34 And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place. 35 And thou shalt set the table without the vail, and the candlestick over against the table on the side of the tabernacle toward the south: and thou shalt put the table on the north side.

36 And thou shalt make an hanging for the door of the tent, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework. 37 And thou shalt make for the hanging five pillars of shittim wood, and overlay them with gold, and their hooks shall be of gold: and thou shalt cast five sockets of brass for them.

woven into them by a skilled worker.

³¹ "Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim woven into it by a skilled worker. ³² Hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases. ³³ Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the covenant law behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

³⁴ Put the atonement cover on the ark of the covenant law in the Most Holy Place. ³⁵ Place the table outside the curtain on the north side of the tabernacle and put the lampstand opposite it on the south side.

³⁶ "For the entrance to the tent make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen—the work of an embroiderer.

³⁷ Make gold hooks for this curtain and five posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold. And cast five bronze bases for them.

Exodus 26 describes how the Hebrew artisans were to make the curtains and coverings for the tabernacle. The

portable sanctuary was designed with curtains of special materials, like finely-woven linen. They were decorated with rare colors, including “blue, purple and scarlet” (v. 31). They were patterned with cherubim, winged angelic figures, woven in intricate designs.

The tabernacle had a central curtain, called the veil, which separated the inside of the tabernacle into two sections. The veil which divided the tabernacle was held up by four special posts covered in gold, with golden “hooks” and “silver bases” (v. 32). The veil separated the Holy Place from the most Holy Place. The most Holy Place was where the ark of the covenant would be kept, over which God would appear in a cloud (see Lev. 16:2). The veil shielded the ark of the covenant from the sin and disorder of the people. Yearly, the high priest would be allowed to go behind the veil to sprinkle blood upon the “atonement cover” for atonement for all of Israel (Ex. 16:17).

Inside the tabernacle would be a “table” to hold bread that was regularly offered to God and a “lampstand,” for a tent with no windows (Ex. 26:35). The table would hold twelve loaves of bread to represent the twelve tribes, and the lampstand would be placed where it could help the priests move about while performing their duties.

An outer entry curtain would create another degree of separation from the disordered lives of those who had not prepared themselves to come before God. At the same time, the tabernacle would occupy a central place in the camp of the Israelites. The grandeur of the sanctuary would represent the sacredness and splendor of God’s holy presence, dwelling among His people.

7. *What is the significance of the cherubim on the curtain of the tabernacle?*

8. *What would the central veil of the tabernacle separate?*

9. *Why would God call for using the finest materials to construct a tabernacle?*

Handling God's Presence with Care

"This room would be perfect for a home office!" With those words, I knew that my family's house hunt was over. After years of placing a desk in the living room—where a young child could wander past at any moment to wave a LEGO creation during Zoom meetings—we would finally have a space perfectly sized for a desk, office supplies, and bookshelves. But most important of all, the office would have a functioning *door*, one which could shut out the noise and commotion of home life.

I'm reminded of this need when I read God's instructions for a tabernacle. Without a question, God wanted to be with His people. God would accompany and protect them as they traveled through the wilderness; and day after day through worship and sacrifice, God would remember Israel and receive their offerings. With the right materials—those which would not corrode or fail—God's presence would not leave them.

But at the same time, many of the instructions for a tabernacle create layers of separation. Like my home office with a secure door, God's presence would be carefully shielded. The tabernacle of Israel was a constant reminder that something was imperfect, that the sin and chaos of human lives gets in the way of being with God. Thus, the instructions for the tabernacle show the graciousness of God. Though an elaborate system of access would be necessary, God didn't stop *wanting* to be with His people. All along, He was preparing to end the separation, to atone for sin, and to fill the earth with His presence.

10. *What makes the tabernacle a symbol of both God's presence and separation?*

11. *How would the tabernacle prevent sin and disorder from entering?*

12. *What times are you more conscious of God's presence? What times do you feel like God is distant?*

Reflecting God's Presence

The Lord, the holy God, chooses to dwell with His people. He gave Moses detailed plans to build a tabernacle as His dwelling place. Under the new covenant, God has poured out His presence in the hearts and lives of believers. Our challenge is to make His indwelling presence and Spirit known to others.

► *Either through truth-telling, mercy, or acts of service, what is one way that you might reflect God's Spirit to others in the week ahead?*

KEY VERSE

And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.

—Exodus 25:8 KJV

Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them.

—Exodus 25:8 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of March 10 through March 16

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Hebrews 5—A Compassionate High Priest.
- Tues.** Leviticus 8:1–13—A Chosen High Priest.
- Wed.** Leviticus 8:14–23—A Cleansed High Priest.
- Thurs.** Psalm 133—A Chaste Priest.
- Fri.** Hebrews 7:1–14—A Commendable High Priest.
- Sat.** Hebrews 7:15–28—A Continuous High Priest.
- Sun.** Exodus 29:1–9, 35–37—A Consecrated High Priest.