

February 2, 2025

INHABITED: EXODUS 40:16-21,34-38

FACILITATOR 2

Introductory Activity (Adapted from ETB LG page 111)

Ask: What is a visible indicator that you and your family are at home? (ETB PSG, 91)

Explain: Sometimes we know someone is home because their porch light is on or you can see the TV light through the front window.

Ask: Does anyone know what visible symbol indicates that the king is in residence at Buckingham Palace in London?

Transition: When King Charles inhabits the palace, they fly a flag called the Royal Standard from the flagpole. Today we will see what indicates the presence of the Lord in the Tabernacle. We will also explore the preparations for His inhabitation and the results of His inhabitation. Last week we discussed God's direction to the people to construct the Tabernacle. Today, our lesson picks up after the completion of its individual parts and its furnishings.

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1. INSTRUCTIONS FOLLOWED (EXODUS 40:16-21)

Read or have someone read Exodus 40:16-21

Explain: This passage is pretty straightforward. Moses tells us the timeframe and process for the construction of the Tabernacle. This description continues through verse 33. While it seems straightforward, we can note a few interesting details that help us understand THE HARD WORK OF PREPARING FOR THE LORD'S PRESENCE.

First, we should note the date. In verse 2, God told Moses to set up the Tabernacle on the first day of the first month of the second year after coming out of Egypt. This is one year after they escape from Egypt. Numbers chapter 9 reveals that this date of construction would make it ready for the first celebration of the Passover holiday. Second, we can note that Moses set up the Tabernacle to God's specifications. This included placing the Ten Commandments in the Ark and placing the mercy seat on top of the Ark.

Read or have someone read Exodus 25:8 (8 "They are to make a sanctuary for me so that I may dwell among them.)

Explain: When God instructed Moses to build the Tabernacle, He explained that it would be a dwelling place of Himself in the midst of the people. Before God could inhabit the space, it had to be made ready for Him. We can apply this to our lives in two ways.

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETB Comm)
- *New American Commentary: Exodus* (NAC)
- *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Exodus* (HOTC)
- *Preaching the Word: Exodus* (Preaching)
- *Exalting Christ in Exodus* (Exalting)

"The text does not state how long the work on the tabernacle took, but it probably took less than six months." (ETB Comm, 101)

"While it would not have been possible to accomplish all the actions in assembling the tabernacle himself, that Moses was associated with every step indicates that the laying out of the tabernacle and all its furnishings were done under Moses's authority and leadership." (ETB Comm, 103)

"The tabernacle was completed and ready for celebrating the first Passover after leaving Egypt, which was only fourteen days away (Num. 9:1-5)." (ETB Comm, 103)

- 1) The Initial Indwelling of the Spirit: The New Testament tells us that before a person comes to faith in Christ, they are an enemy of God (Romans 5:10). The sinful nature of mankind makes it impossible for a holy God to be reconciled to Him. Nevertheless, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ make reconciliation possible. Among other things, the promise of salvation is a promise of the presence of God in the life of the believer. While reconciliation and God's presence are available to everyone, they are not automatic. Just as Moses had to prepare the Tabernacle for the initial indwelling of God's presence, the individual must prepare his or her heart for God's presence. This preparation is both simple and difficult. It is simple because it requires only belief and repentance. Repentance leading to salvation is an acknowledgment of one's sinful condition and turning from that sin to Jesus. It is difficult because the act of repentance can be difficult. Nevertheless, it must be done. In Acts 3, Peter tells the people, ¹⁹ "Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, ²⁰ that seasons of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus, who has been appointed for you as the Messiah." Salvation and its benefits, on earth and in eternity, are promised to everyone, but everyone must make a choice to believe and repent.
- 2) The Ongoing Interaction with the Spirit: As individual followers of Jesus, we are to walk with the Lord daily. We are also instructed to meet with Him corporately as a local body of believers. When we gather on Sundays to worship and learn to grow in Christlikeness, we ask the Lord to meet with us. We desire to experience His presence corporately. For us to truly experience the presence of God in worship, we must prepare our hearts and minds for His presence. Just as Moses had to ready the Tabernacle, we must ready ourselves. We do that through prayer and repentance. We can also incorporate other spiritual practices and habits into our routines to prepare ourselves.

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Discuss: What are some ways that a believer can prepare for worship? (Allow time for discussion.)

Explain: If we are honest, we will admit that at times in our life Sunday morning worship can become routine. This is not what God intended. If we truly consider what Sunday mornings are all about, we will acknowledge the truly remarkable nature of our time together. We are a people redeemed from sin, rescued from hell, and destined for eternity with God. We are celebrating the Creator God of the Universe who chooses to have a personal relationship with each of us. Our time in worship should not be routine. We can prepare for this time through intentional prayer, asking the Lord to prepare us. We can ask the Lord to reveal sin and repent of that sin prior to Sunday morning. We can make a decision to build our calendar around Sundays. Attending

church with an expectant and ready heart requires planning and intentionality. If we truly acknowledge what Sunday morning is all about, we will treat it like the special time that it is.

Summarize Transition: In this passage, Moses readies the Tabernacle for the presence of God. He prepares it the way that God instructed. It was hard work, and it shows that we must be ready to do the hard work of readying our hearts for the presence of God. Let's see what happens when he completes the task.

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2. TABERNACLE INHABITED (EXODUS 40:34-35)

Read (or have someone read) Exodus 40:34-35)

Explain: In these two verses we see a great change for the nation of Israel. We can also glean an understanding of THE HOLY PRESENCE OF THE LORD.

Ask: How do you think the people felt during the setup process knowing that the Lord had promised to dwell among them?

Explain: The people knew that God had promised to dwell among them. They had seen His presence in the cloud that guided them through the desert. They had also seen the presence of God in the cloud that enveloped the mountain. The Lord's presence on the mountain had frightened the people. Exodus 2:18-19 tells us ¹⁸ "All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain surrounded by smoke. When the people saw it they trembled and stood at a distance. ¹⁹ "You speak to us, and we will listen," they said to Moses, "but don't let God speak to us, or we will die." It is possible that as they waited for the Lord to fill the Tabernacle they were feeling just as fearful. We can also imagine that they were waiting with awe-filled anticipation. The coming of God's presence was the culmination of their journey to Sinai. It would change the nation and make it unique among the nations.

Reread or have someone reread verse 34.

Explain: Let's consider first what took place. The cloud that had previously been present on the mountain now hovered over or possibly enveloped the Tabernacle. Then, the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. "God's glory is the weightiness of his divine being, the infinite perfection of his triune deity... God has made his glory visible in a resplendent cloud of radiant light. It was this glorious cloud that descended on the tabernacle, filling it with light." (Preaching, 1101) The Bible does not tell us what this looked like, but 19th-century evangelist F. B. Meyer paints a picture with his words. This "brilliant light, of surpassing glory... shone from within the Tabernacle itself, so much so that the very curtains were transfigured by its glow and the whole place was transfigured and rendered resplendent with glory." (Preaching, 1101)

Reread or have someone reread verse 35

Notes:

"How would an invisible God show his people that he had indeed come to dwell among them as they so earnestly desired and that thereby he was fully in covenant relationship with them... The answer is that he visibly went into his house! He left Mount Sinai and came to dwell among the encampment of his people, just as he had promised he would (33:14-17)." (NAC, 791)

Explain: This verse is very illuminating. To help us see what this verse reveals, let's back up in the construction process. In our previous passage, we saw that Moses had put the pieces of the Tabernacle together. This included being inside the most holy places. Prior to this, God had instructed the artisans of Israel and Bezalel to build furniture for the Tabernacle, including the Ark of the Covenant (37:1-9). In our previous passage from Exodus 40, we saw that Moses assembled the Ark and placed items inside of it. In Exodus 40:35, we learn that Moses was not allowed to enter the Tabernacle at the time of God's initial filling. Moreover, in the book of Numbers, we see that the Ark of the Covenant was not to be touched on the pain of death (Nm 1:51; 4:20). This leads us to ask the question why, could Moses not enter the Tabernacle just minutes after he completed putting it together and why could the Ark not be touched just minutes after Moses had touched it and assembled its parts? The answer is God's presence. This reminds us that God's presence is both sanctifying and restricting. Let's deal with each of those.

GOD'S PRESENCE IS SANCTIFYING: "To sanctify someone or something is to set that person or thing apart for the use intended by its designer."¹ Before God's presence filled the Tabernacle, it was just a tent. When He filled it with His presence, it and the "instruments" used in the religious rituals became set apart or holy.

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Today, we experience sanctification when the Lord takes up residence in our lives. When a person comes to faith in Christ, He deals with our sin problem. That is called justification. The ongoing work of the Spirit in our lives is the process of sanctification. "The focus of justification is the removal of the guilt of sin. The focus of sanctification is the healing of the dysfunctionality of sin."² The work of the indwelling Holy Spirit moves believers toward Christlikeness.

Discuss: What are some ways we can partner with the Holy Spirit and participate in the sanctification process?

Explain: We partner with the Lord first and foremost by listening to the Spirit when He convicts us of sin. We also do so when we intentionally make time to pray and study His Word. Another way we can participate in the sanctification process is to challenge ourselves in ministry or follow as the Spirit challenges and stretches us in areas related to service.

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"The tabernacle was simply a tent until God's presence inhabited it." (ETB Comm, 100)

"That Moses was unable to enter the tent of meeting because of the Lord's presence is also a reminder of the nature of God's holiness." (ETB Comm, 106)

"[T]he tabernacle was now Yahweh's house and no one else's. It was no more appropriate now for Moses to enter the tabernacle, even though he had been all through it as its building supervisor, than it would be for a house builder in modern times to retain a key and enter at will a house that he had built once it was sold to its occupying owner. When the new owner enters, the new house is exclusively his—not the builder's. (NAC, 793)

"The tabernacle was a way to approach God... But when the glory of came down, access was denied...From this we learn how necessary it is for anyone who wants to meet with God to come with a blood sacrifice for sin. Exodus leads right into Leviticus, which begins with God giving Moses a long list of instructions for making sacrifices in the tabernacle... God once again taught his people the necessity of atonement." (Preaching, 1102)

¹ Bradford A. Mullen, "Sanctification," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 708.

² Ibid, 711.

GOD'S PRESENCE IS RESTRICTING: The word *restricted* might sound harsh, but it is the idea that sinfulness is restricted from the presence of a holy God. Moses had been in the presence of the Lord before this as he received instructions related to the Law and the Tabernacle. When God took up residence in His newly constructed home, He made a point to show the people and Moses that the place was holy. Therefore, He restricted Moses from entering it. Of course, this restriction did not continue because God intended for the Tabernacle to actually be a place where His people could meet with Him. But initially, God was making a point about His holiness.

Apply: This can remind us that God is holy, and for us to experience His presence in our lives we need to be holy. Believers still struggle with and sometimes fall into sin. Heartfelt repentance will allow us to continually experience His powerful presence in our lives.

Summarize and Transition: After doing the hard work of preparing the Tabernacle for God's presence, Moses and the people were able to experience the arrival of His presence. Our next passage will show that God's presence will result in blessings for God's people. Let's look at that.

3. GUIDANCE GIVEN (EXODUS 40:36-38)

Read (or have someone read) Exodus 40:36-38

Explain: As we look at this passage, let's start with verse 38. Moses tells us that the cloud hovering over the Tabernacle was "visible to the entire house of Israel." For the people of Israel, the **PRESENCE OF GOD AMONG THEM WAS UNDENIABLE**. At this point, they did not know that their journey to the promised land was going to take them 40 years, but if at any time during that journey someone wondered about the presence of the Lord, they only had to look up and see the cloud. This might cause us to wonder how they could have made some of the unwise decisions that are to come. However, let us not forget that we, as believers filled with His Spirit, also make unwise decisions. To truly benefit from the presence of God, the Israelites and we practice humble submission to the Lord's presence.

FACILITATOR 2

Discuss: What are some practical ways we can remind ourselves of God's presence and the reality of His promises?

Explain: Like the visible, tangible cloud hovering over the nation, visible and tangible things can remind us of God's presence and His promises: a Bible verse background on your phone, post-it notes on the mirror, daily alarms that will elicit your attention are all ways to be reminded.

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Explain: Verses 36 and 37, remind us that **GOD'S PRESENCE WILL LEAD US**. The Israelites did not have to know to get to the promised land. They simply had to follow the cloud. Moreover, they did not have to worry about

"The tabernacle was simply a tent until God's presence inhabited it."
(ETB Comm, 100)

a schedule. They simply had to follow the cloud. In our lives, if we will just follow the Lord and use the tools He has given us (like His Word and other believers), we can know that He will lead us well. Moreover, we do not have to worry about when God will accomplish His plan for our lives or when God will answer a specific prayer. If we simply rely on Him and follow His leading, we can live into His schedule of events.

Pray and ask the Lord to speak to your hearts and calm your anxieties. Ask Him to lead you during times of uncertainty.

Summarize and Transition: In our lesson today, we saw the work necessary to prepare for the presence of God, the qualities of God that accompany His presence, and the blessings that come with His presence. There is one last thing we need to consider though.

CONCLUDE

In verse 16, we read that “Moses did everything just as the Lord had commanded him.” The Lord had a specific plan for the Tabernacle. It would be His temporal dwelling place among the people, but it would also point them, and us, to something even greater. The writer of Hebrews explains this in Hebrews 8:5. It reads, “⁵These serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was warned when he was about to complete the tabernacle. For God said, **Be careful that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain.**” While the blessing of God’s presence in the Tabernacle and later the Temple was great, the Tabernacle pointed to something better. God would later dwell among His people in a different way. John 14 says, “¹⁴The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The word translated “dwelt” is the word for “tabernacled.” God tabernacled with His people in the person of Jesus. Just as with the Tabernacle, His glory was manifested in Jesus. But this, too, points us to a future reality. There is coming a day when man will tabernacle with God. Revelation 21:3 reads, “³Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God’s dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God.” The word “dwelling” is the same as tabernacle. Through the life and work of Jesus, mankind can be made fit to dwell with God for eternity.

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Challenge the group to consider three areas in which they might need to grow.

- 1) Do you need to do the hard work of preparing your heart for salvation? If you have not yet turned from your sin and asked the Lord to save you, you can do so today.
- 2) Do you need to do the hard work of preparing your heart for worship on Sundays? If Sundays have become routine, begin setting aside time to pray or develop some other sort of spiritual practice to help you prepare for church.
- 3) Do you need to trust the Lord more? If you need to trust the Lord’s leadership and rest in the assurance of His timing, ask Him to help you do so.



The Royal Standard in the foreground and the Union Flag (commonly known as the Union Jack) in the background.

