

## **Adjusting to a Different Home**

**by Scott Grant**

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When I traveled to Brazil a few months ago, I lived in a house I had never lived in before. Even though it wasn't significantly different from others I had lived in, it still took an adjustment -- and it wasn't a completely happy one. Oh, the accommodations were wonderful. I even had two maids! But it was different. A week into it, I became restless. These new surroundings, even though they were only slightly different, forced me to make some major adjustments. Think of the adjustments God has to make in order to dwell with man. Constantly throughout the scriptures, he is seeking to dwell with man. The difference between heaven and earth is infinitely greater than the difference between California and Brazil, yet God is determined to dwell with humanity no matter how big the adjustment, even if the adjustment is giving up his own Son.

In Exodus 25-31, the Lord gives Moses instructions for the construction of the tabernacle, which will symbolize his dwelling with the people. This gives us an opportunity to consider not only the present text before us, but also the history of God's dwelling with his people prior to the tabernacle and the future following the construction of the tabernacle.

### **The present (Exodus 25:8, 29:45-46)**

The purpose of the tabernacle is articulated in two places: Exodus 25:8 and 29:45-46. The Lord commissions the construction of the tabernacle that he might "dwell among" the people. These words are used three times in these three verses. What does it mean when the Lord says he will dwell among them? The concept is captured in 29:45, where his dwelling with the people is connected with his promise to be "their God." In that the Lord is God, he is holy and all-powerful. In that he is their God, he loves them and desires to care for them.

The response of the people to the Lord, then, should appreciate both these aspects. In that he is God, he is worthy of worship. In that he is their God, he should be loved. Worship and love, therefore, can be seen as two sides of the same coin, the coin being relationship with God. Relationship with God for us as well embraces both worship of him and love for him.

The Lord will reign as king from the tabernacle. His throne will be above the ark, between the cherubim (2 Samuel 6:2). As the King, he is to be worshiped. The book of Exodus spends seven chapters giving instructions for the construction of the tabernacle and six chapters describing its construction. We may look at all this as boring details, but it shows the importance of worship in the life of Israel, and it shows the importance of worship in our lives as well. The Lord delivered the people out of Egypt so that they might worship him (Exodus 3:18; 5:1, 3; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3).

But the Lord also delivered the people that he might dwell with them (29:45), a concept that also embraces intimacy. Paul says he found righteousness through faith in order that he might know Christ (Philippians 3:8-9). This righteousness, which involves deliverance from the condemnation of sin, just as the Israelites were delivered from Egypt, is not the end but a means to an end. God's redemption of Israel, and of us, is for the purposes of our entering into relationship with him, a relationship that embraces both worship and love in response to his holiness and love for us.

The tabernacle was to be a portable thing. This is the main difference between the tabernacle and the later temple, which was a permanent structure built in Jerusalem. Ample specifications are given to ensure this. The people are nomads in the wilderness. In calling the Israelites to make a portable tent to symbolize his dwelling

with them, the Lord is making himself a nomad, too. He will walk with them from place to place.

He will walk from place to place with us as well. Since I left home to go to college, I've felt like a nomad. Since graduating from college, I have lived in at least a dozen places. At one point not long ago, I lived in five different places over a 12-month span. People have come and gone. I have lived what seems to me at times to be a rootless life. At times it bothers me. I return to my roots, the Santa Clara Valley, and it's become the Silicon Valley. I resonate with these words from a song: "I wandered again to my home in the mountain / Where in youth's early dawn, I was happy and free / I looked for my friends, but I never could find 'em / It seems they were all rank strangers to me." Then I remember: There is something that hasn't changed. Jesus has walked with me. If I've been a nomad, he's been a nomad, too. Every place I go, he is there. He walks with me every step of the way.

The fact that the Lord desires to dwell with the Israelites is an amazing thing in light of the past.

### **The past**

From the beginning, the Lord desired to dwell with man. The garden in Eden was God's land (Genesis 2:8). He dwelt there. Yet because of sin, man was driven from the presence of God (Genesis 3:24). The amazing thing is that the Lord didn't give up on man at this point. He still desires to dwell with man, to be God to man.

In the tabernacle, there is a kind of re-creation going on by which God will dwell with man once again. Therefore, there are some striking similarities between the creation account and the tabernacle account:

-- Each act of creation begins with the phrase, "Then God said ... " The acts in the account of the prescription for the construction of the tabernacle similarly begin with the Lord's speaking to Moses (Exodus 25:1, 30:11, 30:17, 30:22, 30:34, 31:1).

-- The account of the creation is followed by rest on the seventh day -- God's rest (Genesis 2:2). The account of the prescription for the tabernacle is followed by the prescription for the sabbath -- man's rest (Exodus 31:12-17).

-- God saw that his creation was good (Genesis 1:31), and he issued a blessing (Genesis 1:28). Moses, too, issued a positive summation of the tabernacle work and blessed the people (Exodus 39:43).

-- The creation was followed by the fall. The prescriptions for the tabernacle are followed by another fall -- the episode of the golden calf (Exodus 32-34).

Then there are also similarities between the garden in Eden and the tabernacle. Most significantly, both include cherubim (Genesis 3:24, Exodus 25:18). In Genesis, the cherubim guarded the way to make sure that man would not enter God's presence. But here, the cherubim are to be mounted on each side of the ark of the covenant, and the Lord is to be enthroned between them. Here, the cherubim bring God back to man.

Long before he dwelt with Israel, the Lord dwelt with Israel's ancestor, Abraham. The Lord promised Abraham to be "God to you and to your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:7).

The point of all this is that despite man's rebellion against God, God is still seeking to dwell with man. Despite our rebellion against God, God is still seeking to dwell with us.

If the Lord has always sought to live where we live, we haven't been the most gracious hosts, have we? Our sin is an attempt to push the Lord away, to tell him that we don't want him in our home. Although he has been a guest who has lavished gifts upon us, we have attempted to evict him countless times. Yet he keeps coming back. He is determined to dwell with us despite our rebellion against him.

The most exciting thing about the concept of the Lord's dwelling with his people, from the vantage point of the tabernacle, is neither the past nor the present but the future. From our perspective, what has happened since the

tabernacle, and what will happen in our own future, is absolutely stunning.

## **The future**

The tabernacle eventually gave way to the temple, a fixed structure in Jerusalem. Once the people were settled in the promised land, the Lord settled there as well. Wherever the people are, that's where the Lord wants to be. The promised land itself is described as a sanctuary for the Lord's dwelling (15:17).

As we saw in Exodus 29:46, the Lord's dwelling with his people is connected with his being their God. The concept of the Lord's dwelling with his people takes the form of the Lord's ongoing refrain: "I will be their God; they will be my people." It is a refrain that we see picked up by the prophets. The Lord, speaking through Jeremiah, promises his people that "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33).

This is ultimately fulfilled by Jesus Christ. Another of his names, Immanuel, means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). Jesus "dwelt" (literally, "tabernacled") among men (John 1:14). He was the true temple (John 2:19-22). In Christ, not the temple, "the fulness of deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9).

So what did God do in taking on human flesh? He made himself a nomad! He dwelt among us. It's one thing for God to symbolically dwell in a tent; it's quite another for him to literally dwell in human skin. We get the idea that God really desires to dwell with us.

When the magi come to worship, they bypass the gaudy temple in Jerusalem, and they seek out a baby in the small town of Bethlehem. They worship not at a temple but at the feet of Jesus, the tabernacle of God (Matthew 2:11).

In John 14, we get the idea that Jesus is going to do something even more remarkable. The chapter is filled with "dwelling" words (John 14:2, 10, 17, 23, 25). God himself is going to take up residence in two new places: the church, which is the entire body of believers, and each individual within the body. We see him doing just that in the epistles (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21-22). Also present is the refrain, "I will be their God; they will be my people" (2 Corinthians 6:16, Hebrews 8:10).

God, then is dwelling among us and in each one of us. He is "tabernacling" with us. We may feel like nomads, like home is never really home. And it's true, we are aliens of this world who are just passing through. But as we wander through this world, God makes his home with us. He wanders with us. This, of course, is amazing. But amazing turns into staggering when we look to what lies ahead.

John describes it in Revelation 21:1-22:5. Garden themes reappear. So do tabernacle and temple themes. In Revelation 21:2, God brings down his land from heaven: "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband." This land, this city, is also a bride -- the bride of Christ. The bride of Christ constitutes all those who love him. So we are the city!

Will God dwell in this city? Will he dwell among the bride of Christ? Revelation 21:3: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and he shall dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be among them.'" This is the fulfilment of the dwelling motif -- God will dwell with us forever, and he will always be our God, and we will always be his people.

What about the tabernacle/temple? John describes what he sees in intricate detail, but he describes no temple. Revelation 21:22: "And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are it temple." The new city, the new creation, is a temple! The presence of the Lord is everywhere! The symbol of God's presence is no longer needed because the eternal reality has arrived.

This world, then, isn't home. Heaven is not even home. The Lord is home. The Lord is heaven. And one day, home and the Lord will be indistinguishable. What is it that makes home feel like home? It's the people, isn't it? I still visit the home in which I grew up from time to time. But it doesn't quite feel like home. Everyone I grew up with has moved away. So I'm yearning for home, but home isn't a place; it's the Lord.

## God wants to be where we are

If we survey history and gaze into the future, where does God dwell? He dwells in the garden, in the tabernacle, in the temple, in the land, in Jesus, in the church and in believers. His presence fills the New Jerusalem, which he will one day bring down from heaven. What do all these places have in common? They all have people in common. Wherever people are, that's where God wants to be. Wherever you are, that's where God wants to be!

Sally Klein O'Connor sings a fanciful song about a bookstore that invites people to "meet the Author of life" -- Jesus. The character in the song reads the sign in the bookstore window and plans to return to meet Jesus, but she gets sidetracked with other chores. Finally she remembers and hustles down to the bookstore, but it had just closed. The clerk, who turns out to be Jesus himself, lets her in anyway. She remarks that the crowds must have been horrible during the day. Jesus says that actually she's the first one. She's outraged that no one came to see Jesus. But Jesus comforts her, and the song concludes: "Then he opened his arms, and he said, 'Oh, my child; you think no one's paid me my due / Nobody's stood up your Savior and Lord; I came here today to meet you.'"

The Lord has come, and he wants to be with you!

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