

LIFEGROUP STUDY
WITH: East of Eden
2021-11-14

LEADER NOTES

OVERVIEW

Welcome back to our LifeGroup study – WITH. The Tabernacle and Temple were designed to point back to the garden of Eden and to create a space where God’s presence could dwell among his people even in a fallen world. They are both a reminder of God’s holiness and of his desire to dwell among his people. The goal of today’s study is that we would grow a better awareness of just how central the Temple was in the minds of the biblical authors and the people they were writing for.

ICEBREAKER A Sacred Place

Have you ever experienced a sacred place, a moment where you found yourself saying – “Wow, I’m in a sacred place.”? This summer our family toured the oldest church in Canada. It is found in Quebec City. Although I believe God is everywhere, there was something special about being in that place where all the visitors seemed to have a “holy hush” as they looked around. Perhaps for you that “sacred place” was the top of a mountain, or when your child was born. **Share your “sacred place” experience with your group.**

FROM THE SERMON

On Sunday, Pete talked about the Tabernacle and the Temple in the Old Testament. What was a highlight or key insight for you from Pete’s sermon?

STUDY

For our study we’ll explore the accounts of the Tabernacle and the three Temples in the OT. These structures were designed to remind the people of God’s holiness, presence and desire to dwell WITH them.

THE TABERNACLE

From the very beginning of creation, God’s plan was to be WITH his people and they WITH Him. When Adam and Eve sinned, this interrupted the fellowship we had with a holy God. (Gen. 3). The Tabernacle was a temporary means by which the people could once again fellowship with God without being destroyed by His holiness.

READ Exodus 25:8 – The Purpose of the Tabernacle

- **Why was the Tabernacle necessary at this point in history?**
- **What does the Tabernacle teach us about our relationship with God today?**

LEADER NOTE: At this point in history the people had no way to be WITH God. Their sin separated them from His holiness. The Tabernacle was God's plan to once again dwell with His people. The Tabernacle teaches us significant things about our relationship with God today. The Tabernacle shows us in tangible ways what is required to enter God's presence. The alter shows us that sin must be removed through a sacrificial death. The washbasin shows that fellowship with God requires removing uncleanness – anything that conflicts with God's ethical perfection. The curtain between the Holy Place and the most Holy Place reminds us that the Almighty, the most holy God who invites us into fellowship with Him, cannot be approached casually. Source: The Tabernacle – NLT Illustrated Study Bible. p. 785

READ Exodus 40:34-35 - God's Holiness and our Sin

- **Why was Moses not able to enter the Tabernacle when God's glory filled it?**
- **How is this significant to our understanding that sin separates us from a holy God?**

LEADER NOTE: God's glory is the manifestation of his person, his power and his majesty. This is not something we humans can endure! When God's glory filled the Tabernacle, it meant that our holy, transcendent God was once again choosing to dwell with us, to go with His people as they travelled to the Promised Land. But His presence wasn't something to be taken lightly. Sacrifices and rituals were required to enter His presence. The Tabernacles shows us that our sin separates us from a holy God. A sacrifice must be made to make the way for our holy God to be WITH us.

THE FIRST TEMPLE: Solomon's Temple

Solomon's Temple was the permanent structure built in Jerusalem by King Solomon to replace the portable Tabernacle. The Temple was the centre of worship and animal sacrifice for the entire nation of Israel. Three times a year, all Jewish men were required to travel to Jerusalem for a religious festival. This first Temple was destroyed by Babylon (586 BC) when the Israelites were exiled as punishment by God for their sin.

READ: Habakkuk 2:20

"The LORD is in his holy Temple. Let all the earth be silent before him."

- **What does this verse tell us about the significance of the Temple?**

LEADER NOTE:

The Temple located adjacent to the king's palace, represented God's reign over all creation and all nations. The Temple expressed the sovereign and personal relationship between God, his world, and his people. It served to teach Israel about God's exclusive dominion and their total dependence on Him. Source: Temple Worship – NLT Illustrated Study Bible. pg. 766-767

- **How does this verse remind us of the significance of God's holiness?**

LEADER NOTE:

In this verse, the Temple is called “holy”. It is holy because it was the place where God dwelled. The significant structure, beauty and symbolism in the Temple all would have been reminders to the people of God’s holiness. This verse also reminds us of our response – “Let all the earth be silent before him.” God is holy. We are not. God controls all the earth and expects people to worship Him in humble submission. Our natural response to His holiness should be awe and worship!

THE SECOND TEMPLE: Zerubbabel’s Temple

When Persia conquered Babylon, the king of Persia immediately allowed the Israelite exiles to return to their homeland to rebuild the Temple. This Temple, though not as large or impressive as the first, established a place to remind the Israelites of God’s presence. This first group was led by Zerubbabel who had charge of rebuilding the Temple. As a conquered people, the Israelites no longer had a king or an army. As a result, the priesthood replaced the king as the centre of authority in Israel.

READ: Ezra 1:1-5

- **What do you notice about God’s role in the rebuilding of the Temple?**

LEADER NOTE: God had a sovereign role in the building of the second Temple. We read in Ezra that He stirred the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to send the Jewish exiles back to Jerusalem for this project and to supply materials and goods. God also stirred the hearts of the priests and Levites and leaders of the people to unite in this effort to rebuild the Temple.

READ: Ezra 6:14

- After significant opposition, the Israelites persevered and the Temple was completed. **What does this account tell you about God’s desire to be WITH His people?**

LEADER NOTE: When it comes to being with His people, God is sovereign and His plans prevail. Human opposition and lack of resources could not stop His plan. The Temple was completed and worship was restored.

THE THIRD TEMPLE: Herod’s Temple

Herod attempted to pacify his Jewish subjects by building a bigger and better Temple for them. This is the Temple to which Jesus was brought after his birth and where his parents “found” him sitting with the teachers when he was 12. This was also the Temple where Jesus taught and drove out the money changers. Herod’s Temple was destroyed by Rome in A.D. 70, after which the Jews could no longer offer animal sacrifices.

- **What do you think it would have been like for the Jews to see Herod’s Temple?**

LEADER NOTES: On the one hand, the Temple would have been awe inspiring. The dimensions of Herod's court, for example, were 1550 feet by 1000 feet – about 35 acres! There were elements of this Temple that could draw God's people to Him and inspire their awe and worship of this holy God. On the other hand, this Temple was a reminder that they were a defeated people. It was a demonstration of the power and wealth of a conquering foe, a man who set himself up to be a "god" to the people.

- The purpose of this study has been to heighten our awareness of the significance of the Tabernacle/Temple system – to see how these structures were designed to draw people into God's presence and to remind us of His holiness and our sin. **How has this study helped you see God's desire to be WITH His people.**

LEADER NOTES: Although we no longer have these physical structures to remind us of our sin, God's holiness and His desire to be WITH us, studying their purpose helps us to see more of God's plan for us today. Our God desires to be WITH us. Next week we will explore the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan for this in giving us His Son, Jesus – God with us.

EXPERIENCING GOD:

Psalm 84 may very well have been sung by the Israelites as they made their pilgrimage to the Temple, the holy place in Jerusalem. As a LifeGroup or on your own, read through this Psalm 3 times. Notice the ways God's dwelling place, the Temple, is described. Feel the emotions in this Psalm, the longing the Psalmist expresses to be with God (vs. 2).

As you read and meditate on this Psalm, allow God to use this experience to bring you into His presence. Take time to worship Him and enjoy being with Him.

PRAYER

This week let's focus in on our Creekside Youth Ministry. Brennan and Emily will be leading, a series all about "BIG QUESTIONS". As a LifeGroup, or on your own, let's pray that our students would grapple with questions of faith that they have and that our Youth Pastors and group leaders would handle the questions well. Our Youth Ministry is also in need of 2 more female leaders and 2 more male leaders to join the team. Please pray that God places this need on the hearts of those who are considering serving, and that He brings the right people to lead our youth to the team.