6
The Need for Community

Exodus 25:8

"Let them make Me a sanctuary that
I may dwell among them."

We saw in the previous chapter that divinity manifests itself under several guises. There is the God who is near to us and the God who is more distant than anything else. The true meaning of God's name is and, in all likelihood, will remain a mystery. In the next chapter, we will see that the essence or internal nature of God is mysterious as well. But a religion cannot be based on mystery alone. At some point, even an infinite God must make himself available to human beings. This chapter takes up that theme.

The context of Exodus 25:8 is familiar: the people have been liberated from slavery and have entered into a covenant with God. Moses is summoned to ascend Mount Sinai and receive further instruction from God. As part of that instruction, God asks the people to bring him offerings consisting of gold, silver, bronze, colored yarns, fine linen, leather, acacia wood, oil, spices, and precious stones. It is in this context that God tells Moses that he wants the people to make him a sanctuary in the desert, the Tabernacle (*mishkan*).

The Tabernacle was a portable tent shaped like a rectangle 100 cubits (roughly 150–60 feet) long and 50 cubits (75–80 feet) wide. Although scholars have commented on the similarity between the floor plan of the Tabernacle and the battle tent of Ramses II at Kadesh, it is unclear what conclusion we should draw from this except to say that the Torah often takes pagan rituals or artifacts and tries to invest them with

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a deeper meaning.[1] Ramses was regarded as both divine and human; Moses, though a prophet, was only human (see more on this below).

Overall, the Tabernacle was made of wooden poles and enclosed in a fabric of linen with blue, purple, and scarlet threads. The perimeter was divided into two squares 50 cubits on a side. The first square served as an outer court and contained a laver and altar for burnt offerings. The first part of the second square was known as the Holy Place and contained an altar for burning incense, a table for displaying shewbread, and a candleholder.

Beyond the Holy Place was a veiled area housing the Ark of the Covenant, a wooden chest, where the tablets of the Law were kept. It is from the space above the Ark that God spoke to Moses and issued commandments.[2] All of these implements were to be made of pure gold or encrusted with it.

Although it was not designed as a gathering place for the people at large in the way that a modern synagogue is, the Tabernacle was intended to serve as a symbol of God's ongoing commitment to the Israelite people and their willingness to honor and serve him. The wording of the passage says that the Tabernacle should be a place where God can dwell or reside (*shakhan*). In a later age, the Rabbis enlarged on the meaning of *shakhan*, from which they derived the idea of the *Shekhinah*, which refers to God's indwelling presence. But this raises an obvious question: What does it mean for God to dwell somewhere?

Traditionally, tabernacles were places where gods rested or dwelt in the way that a person dwells in a house. If we say that Queen Elizabeth dwells in Buckingham Palace, for example, we mean that the palace contains her and provides a place where people can come to show respect for her. In a pagan religion where gods can inhabit pieces of wood or stone, the idea of a divine dwelling place poses no problem.

According to the biblical scholar Benjamin Sommer, the view that God can inhabit specific locations such as temples or statues carried over into ancient Judaism as well.[3] This should not surprise us: the tendency to concretize God, to think that God is there right before us, runs deep in the human psyche. It would be unrealistic to think that

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any culture could rid itself of this tendency all at once. Note, however, that the passage at hand does not say, "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell *in it*" but "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell *among them*."

To dwell among a people as an energizing force or spirit is different from occupying a physical location. It is true that Exodus 40:34–35 tells us that the glory (*kavod*) of God filled the Tabernacle and prevented Moses from entering. As we will see in the next chapter, though, *kavod* is a highly ambiguous term, so that it is unclear whether it refers to God himself, an earthly manifestation of God, or the honor and respect that we owe to God. Even if Moses cannot enter the Tabernacle when it is filled with God's glory, we still have to ask whether the reason is physical (there is no room for him) or spiritual (he is overwhelmed).

Later passages in the Bible try to resolve the ambiguity. When Solomon (1 Kings 8:27) dedicates his Temple, which unlike the Tabernacle was a permanent structure, he points out that if all heaven and earth cannot contain God, it is foolish to suppose that a structure built by human hands can. The same sentiment is echoed at Isaiah 66:1: "The heaven is My throne / And the earth is my footstool: / Where could you build a house for Me?" On my reading, these passages provide a corrective to Exodus 25:8 by never letting us forget that an infinite God cannot be contained by a finite structure no matter how luxurious it may be.

Even if this is true, the Bible scholar Richard Friedman is right to point out that more is said about the Tabernacle and its contents than any other subject in the Torah.[4] We are given intricate instructions for how it is to be assembled and exactly what materials are to be used. There are also detailed instructions for making the vestments of the High Priest. Based on the figures given at Exodus 38.24–26, some scholars estimate that it would have taken over two thousand pounds of refined gold and six thousand pounds of silver to carry out God's directions. Because it was portable, the entire structure would have had to be taken apart and reassembled each time the people moved to a different location.

Although scholars have long wondered whether such a structure

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was ever built, the real question raised by the passage is not historical but theological. No other passage in the Torah contains anything comparable to this one in the way of visual detail. For example, we do not know what Abraham was wearing when he went to the mountain to sacrifice Isaac. Nor do we know exactly what Joseph's coat of many colors looked like.

Until Exodus 25:8 we are given no reason to think that God needs to be worshipped in a tabernacle at all. None of the patriarchs had one. Although they erected altars from which to sacrifice to God, no specific instructions are given for how to make them, and there is no indication that they were intended for anything but one-time use. Moses does not have a tabernacle when he is alone with God on the mountain, nor does he put on jewelry or special clothing. Why, then, does God decide that a tabernacle is needed at this point, and why must it be made of the costliest materials?

Abraham's Judaism and Its Limitations

To answer this question, let us return to Abraham and ask about the religion he practiced. We know that he had faith (trust) in God and was accounted righteous as a result. But if we probe deeper into the question of Abraham's religion, we run into a problem: with the exception of circumcision, he had no standardized practices. He sacrificed to God on certain occasions, but these sacrifices were spontaneous rather than part of a recurring festival. There was nothing in the way of established prayer, dietary laws, or community gatherings. Because the *Shema* does not appear until Deuteronomy 6:4, it is likely that Abraham never heard of it.

According to Jewish tradition, the picture is a bit more complicated. The Talmud maintains that when God entered a covenant with Noah after the Flood (Genesis 8:1–9:17), seven commandments were given: prohibitions against idolatry, blasphemy, murder, theft, impermissible sexual unions, and the eating of flesh with blood in it. To these were added a positive commandment to establish courts where justice could be administered.[5]

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Because all human life after the Flood descends from Noah, these commandments—the Noahide Laws—were thought to be binding on the people of every nation. Taken together, they are the minimal standards needed to uphold human dignity and create an orderly society. Maimonides went so far as to argue that they are so basic that, with the exception of the one dealing with eating meat with blood in it, they were given to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, even though the Torah never says so explicitly.[6]

From a philosophic perspective, the Noahide Laws are one of the first expressions of what eventually came to be known as natural law: universal principles without which civilization could not survive. We can therefore assume that Abraham not only knew about them but was bound by them. Note, however, that none of these laws says anything about prayer, festivals, or houses of worship. In principle, an atheist could abide by them as long as he did not blaspheme God. Except for the one dealing with law courts, none impels a person to take part in any kind of community practice. A hermit living in an isolated location could fulfill them as well.

That leaves Abraham with natural law and circumcision. While there is a Rabbinic tradition according to which Abraham observed all the commandments that would eventually be given to Moses at Mount Sinai, the Torah is silent on the matter.[7] Despite all of this, there is no question that God looked with favor on Abraham and that later generations of Jews, Christians, and Muslims regarded him as a model of religious devotion.

The only way to explain Abraham's status is to say that *in principle* (emphasis necessary) it is possible to serve God in a spontaneous fashion without the trappings that come with an organized religious tradition. The Apostle Paul (Romans 4) took this to mean that the practices that define Judaism as a religion are not necessary: all that is needed is faith in God. In support of this, he points out that the Torah tells us that Abraham trusted in God and was proclaimed righteous *before* he was circumcised, so that his righteousness had nothing to do with any commandment specific to Judaism.

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Needless to say, Jewish tradition looks at the matter differently. Although the Torah presents Abraham as the first Jew, it says nothing about his theology. Did he think that his God is the only deity or that his God is the most powerful among a number of others? We saw that both Rabbinic and philosophic authorities in the ancient world sought to fill in the missing details by claiming that Abraham had the intellectual acumen to reject idolatry and embrace monotheism on his own.

Building on this tradition, Maimonides maintains that Abraham had powerful arguments to establish the truth of monotheism.[8] Unfortunately, these arguments, though valid, were purely theoretical. This means that Abraham tried to spread monotheism by appealing to people's minds alone. Though Abraham passed his arguments on to Isaac, and Isaac on to Jacob, in connection with Joshua 24:14, Maimonides goes on to say that the Israelites abandoned monotheism during the Egyptian captivity and adopted their captors' pagan religion. In short, Abraham's religion, though flawless intellectually, was a failure politically.

Maimonides concludes that after the Exodus from Egypt, God had to start over. Recognizing that arguments alone would not carry the day, he gave Moses a list of commandments mandating prayer, festivals, dietary laws, a priesthood, special articles of clothing, marriage rites, and, last but not least, a house of worship. These commandments are important because for the first time they established a community of worshippers rather than a relation between God and an individual person. According to Exodus 30:11–15, everyone was supposed to contribute a half shekel for the construction of the Tabernacle so that "the rich shall not pay more and the poor shall not pay less."

To be sure, God does not need our prayers, festivals, or sanctuaries to survive. Nor did Abraham need them to serve God. But, Maimonides adds, these practices are intended for our sake, not God's. In political terms, they provide the social glue that brings people together. Our provisional conclusion, then, is that people need to come together at appointed times, break bread, sing songs, pray, and have identifying symbols or articles of clothing if they are to survive *as a people*. This is

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as true for religious institutions as it is for secular ones like universities, military regiments, and charities.

Still, there is more to worship than social interaction. In theological terms, these things are all ways of bringing God into our lives; as Heschel put it, of sensing in small things the beginning of infinite significance; or as I put it, of achieving vertical reach. Looked at from one perspective, lighting candles on Friday night is just the kindling of two pieces of wax; looked at from another, it is a way of revisiting the whole issue of creation. The same can be said for sips of wine, pieces of cloth, or musical notes. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, then so is spiritual meaning.

The Need for Something More

Although Kant did not study Maimonides very closely, he came to a similar conclusion roughly six hundred years later.[9] The difference is that Kant framed his argument in political terms rather than theological ones. In a primitive state of nature, where no government exists and people can do whatever they want, the result is anarchy or what Thomas Hobbes called a war of all against all. In such conditions, no one's life or property is secure. Without basic security, it is impossible for anyone to benefit from the advancements of art and science. Recall that one of the Noahide Laws was to establish courts where justice could be administered. For present purposes, *justice* is another name for the rule of law.

Let us suppose, then, that people have reached a collective decision to leave the state of nature and form a government.[10] Although they sacrifice some of their freedom, the argument goes, this sacrifice is more than offset by the gains they reap in having their life and property protected. But, adds Kant, however important, protection of life and property is not enough. If a society is going to help the poor, care for the sick, and offer comfort to those in distress, it will need something that encourages people to look beyond their own welfare and promote the welfare of others.

Now comes Kant's great insight: we cannot do a satisfactory job

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of promoting the welfare of others if we act as isolated individuals. Just as reason compels us to leave a political state of nature and form a government, it also compels us to leave a moral state of nature and band together under the auspices of a religious institution or church. Simply put: we need the encouragement, talent, and fellowship of other people if we are to have any chance of accomplishing the goals that morality assigns us.

Unlike the state, which comes into existence when we leave a political state of nature, the church has no power to coerce. Kant conceives of it as a voluntary organization of like-minded people trying to work for the betterment of the human race. By *voluntary*, he means that no one can be forced to join, punished for not joining, or required to accept beliefs to which her conscience is opposed. Granted that actual churches have not always been this enlightened; Kant's point is that this is what the *ideal* of a church requires.

Given such ideal conditions, the state can only concern itself with outward behavior. It can prevent theft and murder, require people to pay their taxes, and decide when to go to war. But there is no way that the state can require people to give alms, live a life of mercy and humility, or repent for their sins. For that, we need religious authority rather than civil.

By its very nature, then, the state can use *either* persuasion *or* force to ensure obedience. In effect it says, "We would like you to pay your taxes because you are willing to contribute your fair share to society, but if this does not convince you, we will put you in jail." In Kant's view, however, the only thing available to the church is persuasion. Although Kant was not enamored of Judaism, his position on these matters bears strong similarities to that of Moses Mendelssohn, the father of modern Jewish philosophy.[11]

There is no question that separation of church and state is foreign to the world of the Torah, where the roles of prophet, lawgiver, and political leader are vested in one person. It is also foreign to the traditional conception of the Messianic Age, when a king who teaches the Torah and lives by its precepts is supposed to restore political sovereignty to Israel.

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Still, the distinction has taken root in most industrial democracies and has been an enormous boon to the Jewish people. Regardless of how one views the distinction, it is undeniable that both Maimonides and Kant have hit on something important. Fellowship is impossible without what I referred to earlier as social glue. The difference is that while Maimonides thought religious rituals would always be necessary to hold people together, Kant looked forward to the time when they would wither away and be replaced by moral principles alone.

This raises the same question over again. If Abraham's proofs for the existence of God were not enough to sustain a religious community, would a set of moral principles fare any better? Maimonides's answer is no. Valid as these principles might be, people will always need special times and places where they can rededicate themselves to living by them. And they will always need the fellowship of other people who have chosen to do the same. Even secular states use songs, flags, parades, and monuments to symbolize and reinforce shared values.

As soon as we talk about the symbols and shared values of a people, we have to consider the historical circumstances that bind them together. According to Maimonides, when the Israelites adopted the pagan practices of their captors, God realized that the Israelites had to be reintroduced to monotheism. But he also realized that too sudden a transition from a pagan religion to a monotheistic one would fail all over again.

In view of this, the Israelites had to be weaned away from paganism in stages. If the Egyptians had an established priesthood, the Israelites would have one too. If the Egyptian priests officiated in luxurious sanctuaries, the High Priest of Israel would officiate in a luxurious Tabernacle and eventually in a permanent Temple in Jerusalem. Beyond that, God instituted festivals that coincided with the harvest seasons of the Middle East and commemorated the Exodus from Egypt. What Israelite religion would not have are plastic representations of God, humans who are worshipped as gods, or instruments to facilitate divination. All of that was to be left behind in Egypt.

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Natural and Statutory Law

As often happens in matters relating to human behavior, one problem is solved only to create another. While Abraham's religion may have been enough for a person of unquestioned piety, it was not enough to sustain an entire nation. The problem is that as soon as you establish a priesthood and build a house of worship, you create the need for people who can raise money, carve wood, cast gold, and keep the priests housed, clothed, and fed—in our terms, you create the need for a bureaucracy.

Despite the negative connotations of the term in our day, a bureaucracy is not always bad; no institution could exist without one. But as anyone who has dealt with a bureaucracy knows, it can become a self-serving body that loses sight of the goals it was designed to accomplish. Might a person who carried out the intricate directions for the construction of the Tabernacle not long for the simple, uncluttered piety of Abraham?

One way to approach this question is to recognize that most legal systems consist of two kinds of laws: those like the prohibitions against theft and murder, without which no society could exist, and those like traffic regulations, which, though necessary, could be otherwise. It is customary to classify the first under the heading of *natural law* and the second under the heading of *statutory law*. The point is that, unlike the prohibition against murder, traffic regulations can vary from one jurisdiction to the next. In the United Kingdom, people drive on the left side of the road; in the United States, they drive on the right.

Jewish tradition recognizes a parallel distinction between *mishpatim*, often translated as "ordinances" or "laws," and *chukkim*, often translated as "statutes" or "rules." Thus Deuteronomy 4:1: "And now, O Israel, give heed to the laws and rules that I am instructing you to observe." According to the Rabbis, the ordinances or laws are those commandments such that if God had not given them to us, we would have been justified in giving to ourselves.[12] The reasoning is that they are so basic, we could not live without them. The statutes or rules are those commandments that we would not necessarily have come up with on our own (e.g., the prohibition against eating pork).

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Although the reasons for obeying the statutes might not be as clear as those for obeying the laws, both are mandatory. According to some, Maimonides not included, the reason for obeying the statutes is simply that God commanded them.[13] In any case, it should be clear that the commandment to build the Tabernacle is a statute. Had the Israelites been liberated from a country other than Egypt or liberated at a different point in their history, its design might have been different as well. Had the Israelites remained true to the monotheism of Abraham, the Tabernacle might never have been built at all.

Our questions then become: Might people pay more attention to the statutes than they do to the laws, in effect missing the forest for the trees? Might a university pay more attention to caps, gowns, and fight songs than it does to education? Might a charitable organization pay more attention to dinner dances and golf outings than it does to helping the poor?

The answer is obviously yes. Though necessary to sustain a community, statutory laws create the danger that people will become so focused on details that they will forget the ideals for which the community stands. In time, Isaiah (1:11–17) will excoriate the people, saying that God is fed up with their sacrifices, finds incense an abomination, and takes no interest in their observance of festivals. In fact, the prophet has God say that he will not listen to the people's prayers and will hide his eyes from them. What, then, does God want? The answer is clear. In the words of Isaiah: "Cease to do evil; / Learn to do good. Devote yourself to justice; / Aid the wronged. Uphold the rights of the orphan; / Defend the cause of the widow."

One interpretation of the cause for Jesus's break with the Judaism of his time is that it put too much emphasis on the statutory aspect of religion and did not heed Isaiah's message. This view laid the groundwork for the claim that Judaism is concerned mainly with outward forms of behavior like Sabbath observance or dietary laws and neglects the inner life of the soul.

The truth is, however, that no sooner did Christianity establish itself as a separate religion than it too encountered the need for statutory

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laws. A priesthood was established, luxurious cathedrals were built, laws codified, courts established, and sacraments instituted. Under these conditions, it is hardly surprising that the same question arose again: Might the church hierarchy be more interested in the outward trappings of religion than in saving souls?

A number of reformers, including Martin Luther, thought so. But the institutions that they set up were not immune to the problem either. There is no way to roll back centuries of human history and return to the simple piety of Jesus and his disciples. As soon as large numbers of like-minded people band together, buildings, symbols, special articles of clothing, and some form of ritual become necessary. The truth is, however, that ritual can never be the whole story. Just as one might have difficulty imagining Moses putting on the vestments of the High Priest, it is difficult to image Jesus standing at the high altar of the Vatican.

In short, the problems posed by the statutory part of religion are not unique to Judaism; they are essential features of the human condition. Few people can remain focused on abstract ideas like monotheism or justice all the time. Even if more people could, abstract ideas are not the be-all and end-all of human life. There are also histories, paintings, and music, not to mention ceremony and celebration. It is the job of a religious institution to bring together people with talent in each of these areas and direct their efforts to the service of God. If all we had were Abraham's arguments for God's existence, human life would be greatly impoverished as a result.

At Exodus 31:2–5 God gives voice to this very point: "I have singled out by name Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft; to make designs for work in gold, silver, and copper, to cut stones for setting and to carve wood." Looking beyond Judaism, the same might be said of Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, Bach, Milton, or Verdi. In their own way, all tried to direct our attention upward, all found a way to make temporal things call to mind the eternal.

To carry this theme a step further, it has long been observed that there is a similarity between the design for the Tabernacle and the ac-

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count of the creation in Genesis.[14] God goes to work separating light from darkness, water from dry land, and various forms of plant and animal life from one another. On the seventh day, he rests from all his labors. What emerges is a picture of God as an architect or craftsman.

This picture is consistent with the instructions for the Tabernacle, where we read numerous times "You shall make . . ." The implication is that by building a house of worship, humans are imitating the creative activity of God. That is why care must be taken to follow the instructions exactly as given and to use the finest materials available.

It is an interesting fact that neither the Tabernacle, nor Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, nor the Parthenon in Athens had arches to distribute the weight of their structures. That technique would not appear until Roman times. Once the arch was introduced, people could erect domed structures, in effect a 360-degree arch. Aside from its natural beauty, the arch has no seams and thus resembles the vault of heaven more than any rectilinear shape could.

Once the arch was introduced, the idea of imitating God's creative activity became even more pronounced. What better way to imitate God than to build a structure that serves as a model for what God built? Although the design for the Tabernacle did not envision a domed structure, it provided divine sanction for architectural creations through the ages.

Why the Tabernacle Is Not a Panacea

No magical formula dictates how much statutory law is too much and how much is too little. There will always be people who insist that religious life is not authentic unless it goes into meticulous detail about how to live and people who think that it is not authentic unless it retains a degree of spontaneity. By the same token, there will always be people who find transcendent value in magnificent works of art and people who ask why the money to make them was not used to feed the poor. What helps one person turn *to* God may induce another to turn *away from* God.

The difficulty of the question "How much is too much?" is represented in the Torah by the juxtaposition of the design of the Tabernacle

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with the story of the Golden Calf. According to the narrative, while Moses is on the mountain hearing about the gold that will go into the Tabernacle, the people below have begun to make an idol out of gold, and they ask Aaron to preside over a ceremony at which they will bow down to that idol. If one represents the zenith of communal responsibility, the other represents the nadir.

Following Rabbinic sources, Rashi argues that the order of the narrative is the opposite of what the story suggests.[15] According to him, the instructions for the Tabernacle were given on Yom Kippur *after* the people were forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf. One advantage of this reading is that it allows us to see the Tabernacle as a concession, as if God were to say: "If, unlike Moses and the patriarchs, you insist on having a tangible symbol of My presence, I will give you one where the priests can worship in an approved manner." Still, the similarity between the Tabernacle and the Golden Calf and the fact that Aaron, the High Priest, plays an important role in both contexts cannot be ignored.

Nor can the problems created by lavish building projects. Solomon used forced labor, including forced Israelite labor (1 Kings 5:13–14), to build his Temple—exactly what made people cry out against Pharaoh. Unlike Moses, who had Bezalel, Solomon relied on foreign (i.e., pagan) help to supervise the work (1 Kings 7:13). The tax burden needed to buy the materials and pay the craftsmen was not distributed evenly, which may have led to the breakup of the kingdom after his death. Isaiah's claim that God is fed up with burnt offerings, incense, and festivals is echoed by both Amos (5:21–22) and Micah (6:6–8). Finally, Hosea (6:6) tells us in no uncertain terms that God desires mercy (*chesed*), a moral virtue, not animal sacrifice.

We should be careful not to misinterpret these passages. It is not that the Prophets were calling for the destruction of the Temple or the abolition of the priestly cult. Rather, they thought worship had become perfunctory and that the people had lost sight of its real purpose. The reason is not hard to discern. It is easier to sacrifice an animal, burn incense, and celebrate a festival than it is to treat people in a merciful

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or humane manner. If the latter requires a change of heart, the former requires nothing but an outward show of piety.

How do you get someone to undergo a change of heart? Exodus 25 teaches us several things. First, the people needed to feel that God was among them. If they abandoned monotheism during the Egyptian captivity, it might be because they had begun to doubt that this was so. By the time of Exodus 25, they still did not have a homeland. The Tabernacle was intended to serve as a symbol that God had not forsaken them and would dwell among them as they reached their final destination.

Second, they needed to develop responsibility for themselves as a people. Having been liberated from slavery, they were now asked to embark on a community project. Although not everyone was able to enter the Tabernacle, everyone was able to contribute something to its construction and take pride in what was accomplished—a structure fit for the supreme ruler of the universe. This would not have been possible if the Tabernacle had been made of tin.

Third, they needed something that established a boundary between the sacred and the profane. The Sabbath is holy because it is set apart from the other six days of the week. Israel is supposed to be holy because it is separate from the other nations of the earth. Likewise, the Tabernacle was to demarcate a special place where God could speak to Moses and divinely ordained rituals could be performed.

Is this enough? We know that the answer is negative, because in the ensuing chapters, the people continue to provoke God, lose confidence in his saving power, and quarrel among themselves. Eventually, God becomes so annoyed with them that they are forced to wander in the desert until a new generation takes their place.[16] As the Prophets indicate, even the Promised Land and Solomon's Temple are not sufficient to solve the problem. Nor for that matter are the Vatican, Saint Paul's Cathedral, Hagia Sophia, or any other house of worship. Houses of worship can excite, inspire, and instill pride, but in the end, the effect they have on people is only as good as the people who worship in them.

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Although some may have thought that the Jewish people would perish when the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in the year 70, history proved them wrong. A people does not need a centralized place of worship to survive. In time, the Rabbis came to see that God does not need gold, silver, or priestly vestments to dwell somewhere: his presence can be felt whenever two people sit together to discuss words of Torah.[17]

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