

Worship *and* Dedication



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 25:22; Numbers 7: 8; Zech. 4:1–6, 11–14; Rev. 4:2, 5; 11:4.*

Memory Text: “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7).

No question, the children of Israel are separated from our modern world through the vast gaps of time and culture. Their world is, in many ways, as incomprehensible to us as ours would be to them.

Nevertheless, the unifying factor is the Lord, the One who created and redeemed them, as well as us. Whatever the gaps in culture, language, and history, we worship the same God, no matter the differences in our forms and expressions. Indeed, the basic truths taught to them through their rites and rituals are, in principle, the same ones we are to learn today.

This week we'll continue to follow our spiritual ancestors on their journey of faith. We'll examine more of the rituals, laws, and commands that God gave His people at that time. Among other things, we'll look at the dedication of the altar of burnt offering, at the menorah (lampstand) in the earthly sanctuary, as well as the ordination of the Levites to their sacred calling of working with the priests in their ministration of the sanctuary in the wilderness.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 17.*

Altar Dedication

In the wilderness sanctuary, the sacrifices centered on the altar of burnt offering. Constructed of acacia wood overlaid with bronze, the altar stood within the courtyard near the entrance to the two-apartment sanctuary. The golden altar before the veil of the Most Holy Place served only for the burning of incense.

Read Numbers 7. What thoughts come to your mind as you read about the offerings given during this solemn ritual? What spiritual points from this account can be applied to ourselves today? For instance, where do you see the Cross represented here?

The altar already had been consecrated for seven days (*Exod.* 29:37). Now the princes—as representatives of the full nation—brought offerings to celebrate the dedication of the altar over a period of 12 days. Each prince and his tribe had their special day. All the gifts were identical; perhaps this was a way of showing that no matter who we are or our station in life, we all stand before God in the same position, that of sinners needing grace.

“The Jews saw in the sacrificial offerings the symbol of Christ whose blood was shed for the salvation of the world. All these offerings were to typify Christ and to rivet the great truth in their hearts that the blood of Jesus Christ alone cleanseth from all sin.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 106, 107.

It’s so easy to get caught up in the things of the world, isn’t it? What can you do each day to help keep the reality of the Cross, and what was done for you there, first and foremost in your mind?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *2 Corinthians 9:7*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Examine the role of sacrifice in the dedication of the temple furnishings and the Levites in preparation for service.

Feel: Have a sense of the holiness and purity of God in our worship.

Do: Practice reverence for God and deep appreciation of the gift of Christ on our behalf.

► **Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: The Role of Sacrifice in Service

A The bronze altar was dedicated in a 12-day service that involved identical sacrificial gifts from the leaders of every tribe. What were the possible effects of these contributions from each tribe?

B How are the Holy Spirit and His light important parts of worship? How are communion and conversation between God and ourselves, illustrated by Moses' and God's communion, an important part of worship?

C The people of Israel laid their hands on the Levites, who were then presented before God by Aaron as a living "wave offering." How were the Levites a living sacrifice, a symbol of Christ's sacrifice?

II. Feel: Worshiping a High and Holy God

In taking part in the dedication of the sacrificial altar and the dedication of the servants and priests of the temple, the people entered into the spirit of giving and in the acknowledgment of Christ's all-encompassing gift of His life. How do we enter into the spirit of worship?

III. Do: Reverence and Worship

A How do we join ourselves to the work of the church and Christ's work as Intercessor and Servant-leader?

B How can we keep the lamps of the Spirit lit and communication open between ourselves and God, who dwells in eternal light?

► **Summary:** God, the originator of light, life, and intimacy, seeks our face as we, in worship, seek His.

Communion With God

As a symbol, the ark was at the hub of Israelite worship. It symbolized God's heavenly throne. "The Lord of hosts . . . sits enthroned on the cherubim" (*2 Sam. 6:2, RSV*). In the Most Holy Place, the visible Shekinah glory, hovering between the cherubim, represented the Lord's presence. The Ten Commandments beneath the cherubim throne attested to the Divine will, the foundation of the covenant between God and His people—and the moral basis for His universal rule and government. The law provided the worshipers an insight into the character of God, in addition to stipulating His righteous requirements.

Read Exodus 25:22 and Numbers 7:89. Try to imagine what kind of an experience this would be. How would you like to have that kind of close encounter with God? What makes you think that you wouldn't be destroyed completely were you to get too close to Him? See *Exod. 20:19*.

In what sense can you today get even closer to the presence of God? See *Heb. 4:14–16*. How has Jesus made this approach possible?

Notice, too, how Moses had gone into the sanctuary to speak to the Lord. Yet, according to the text, the Lord spoke to Moses instead. The point is, most of us know how to pray, most of us know how to speak to the Lord, to plead our case, to ask for this or that.

But communion isn't just one way. In most relationships, each party will communicate with the other. Should it be any different between us and our Maker? Of course not.

The question for us, then, is, How open are we to hearing the voice of God when He is speaking to us?

What have your experiences in communion with God been like? How has the Lord communicated His will to you? How open are you to hearing His voice? What things in your life might be keeping you from a fuller communion with the Lord?

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Across different times and different cultures, worship—individual and corporate—remains central to humanity’s response to God.

More than 175 years ago Robert Grant penned these majestic words:

O worship the King, all glorious above,
O gratefully sing His wonderful love;
Our shield and defender, the Ancient of days,
Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise.


O tell of His might, O sing of His grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.

Thy bountiful care, what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail;
Thy mercies, how tender! How firm to the end!
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend!
—*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 83
(Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing
Association, 1985).

Grant masterfully expresses many characteristics of God that draw us to worship Him. With artistic passion and skill he paints a picture of a God who is both awesome and personal.

Opening Activity: Ask class members to reflect on specific phrases in the hymn that call them to worship God. Have them offer *specific* examples from their lives that make that phrase meaningful to them (for instance, What did God do for you that exemplified His “bountiful

C O N T I N U E D 

Light in the Sanctuary

When Moses entered the sanctuary after the 12 days devoted to the dedication of the altar in the court, we may assume that it was dark inside the Holy Place. In that conversation, the Lord directed that Aaron should light the seven lamps of the “candlestick,” known in Hebrew as the menorah, based on the Hebrew word *or*, for light (*Num. 8:1–4*).

The menorah (or candlestick) with its main shaft and six branches (three on either side) was hammered from a single talent of gold. It was in the form of a stylized almond branch (*Exod. 25:31–40*). The oil lamps, resting atop each branch, were attended by the priests twice a day—morning and evening (*Exod. 30:7, 8*). “[Aaron] shall keep the lamps in order upon the lampstand of pure gold before the Lord continually” (*Lev. 24:4, RSV*; emphasis added).

What insights do the following texts give as to the meaning of the menorah?

Zech. 4:1–6, 11–14

Rev. 4:2, 5; 11:4

Zechariah’s vision implies that the oil piped to the menorah lamps, enabling them to burn, is God’s Spirit (*vss. 5, 6*). The Hebrew word for the almond (*Jer. 1:11, 12*) means “to watch” or “to wake.” The almond literally was named the “wake tree” or “watch tree” because it was the earliest tree “to waken” and flower. John sees in the heavenly representation of the sanctuary a menorah of seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are identified as “seven Spirits of God”—John’s mode of referring to the Holy Spirit in His multiple operations.

Thus, Israel in the wilderness was assured day and night of God’s presence in the first apartment, as well as in the second.

How has the Lord shown you the reality of His presence in your own life? Go back over those times when clearly you’ve experienced God’s presence in a remarkable manner. How can revisiting these experiences help you to stay firm in times that you feel yourself wallowing in fear and darkness? See Psalm 23.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

care” or His role as “defender”? How has a personal frailty or flaw led you to depend on God? How have you experienced His “wonderful love” or His “grace”?).

Just for Teachers: Rather than just reading the words, sing them or play a recording of the song.

▶ **STEP 2—Explore****Bible Commentary**

I. Altar Dedication (*Review Numbers 7, Exod. 29:37, Rom. 5:6–9 with the class.*)

Just as the bronze altar of sacrifice was the beginning of communion with God in the Old Testament sanctuary ritual, so the cross of Christ, the place and enduring symbol of His sacrifice, is the beginning of full communion with God. Sin roadblocks our access to God; for, as sin’s prisoner, we do not have the right to choose Him. However, the Cross pays our debt and restores our right to choose God. The Cross guarantees that we now have the freedom to choose. Many have not exercised their right to choose God and, by default, remain Satan’s prisoners.

Consider This: The dedications of the altar of burnt offerings were ways of acknowledging the importance of the substitutionary sacrifice. What rituals or regular activities have we built into our lives to acknowledge the importance of Christ’s sacrifice?

II. Communion With God (*Review Exod. 25:22, 20:19, Num. 7:89, 2 Sam. 6:2, Heb. 4:14–16, 10:19–25 with the class.*)

The ark of the tabernacle suggests a number of things with regard to the plan of salvation. Its location suggests that God is not easily approached. In the Old Testament era only the high priest could enter directly into the Lord’s presence, as represented by the Most Holy Place. This does not imply arrogance or self-conceit on God’s part but, rather, compassion for sinful human beings who cannot live in the presence of holiness. Apparently, Uzzah’s lack of respect for this concept cost him his life (*2 Samuel 6*). But the fact that God has made

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Dedication of the Levites: Part 1

Read Numbers 8:6–26, describing the dedication of the Levites to their special work in the service of God. What points impress you regarding this service? What does this teach us about holiness, about sin, about purification, and about dedication to God? What principles can we take away from this for our lives today, regardless of whatever role we play in the Lord’s service?

The families of the three divisions of the Levites were encamped around the sanctuary. Because they numbered more than twenty thousand (*Num.* 3:39), it is obvious that some parts of their dedication were done by symbolic representation. That is, only certain ones, representatives, as opposed to all the Levites, were involved directly and immediately.

What’s fascinating here, too, is the idea that the Levites—after they were cleansed and shaven, and after they offered a sin offering (*Num.* 8:7, 8)—were called an “offering” or a “wave-offering” (*vs.* 11). This certainly wasn’t anything related to human sacrifice. Instead, it gave the idea of dedication, of consecration, and of acknowledgment that these Levites were going to be doing a work in behalf of Israel, doing for them what they couldn’t be doing for themselves.

This is seen even more when Moses said that “the children of Israel shall put their hands upon the Levites” (*vs.* 10), acknowledging that these responsibilities had been passed on to the Levites. The tribe as a whole was offered as a living sacrifice to God, who in turn gave them as a gift this special ministry in the sanctuary in place of the firstborn, whom they now represented.

Keeping the principles in mind seen in this ceremony, how do we understand what Paul says in Romans 12:1? How can we be a “living sacrifice”? What does that mean in our daily lives?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Himself as close and as available as possible demonstrates that God has not given up on the human race (*Exod. 25:8*). He wants, once again, to live with His people and enjoy intimate fellowship.

The tabernacle symbolized the way to restored fellowship. This first step was the sacrifice that was substituted on the sinner's behalf (justification). The next was the washbasin, representing a cleansing from sin (sanctification). The Holy Place represented the means of ongoing fellowship with God—living in the light of God's Word, feeding on the "bread of life," and communion with God through prayer. Ultimately this would lead to glorification or the restored open face-to-face communion that Adam and Eve had enjoyed in Eden.

Consider This: If we plan to enjoy face-to-face fellowship with God, what should we *now* be doing to avail ourselves of the steps leading to that experience? The tabernacle service was a persistent round of activities—morning and evening sacrifices, a constantly burning lamp, fresh bread supplied regularly, and so on. What do they suggest about the value of persistence in maintaining a relationship with God?

III. Light in the Sanctuary (*Review Zech. 4:1–6, 11–14; Rev. 4:2, 5; 11:4; Jer. 1:11, 12 with the class.*)

Oil, symbolizing the Holy Spirit, was the source of light in the Holy Place, or outer room in the tabernacle. While only the high priest was allowed to approach God in the Most Holy Place—and that was limited to the Day of Atonement—God still was present in the outer room throughout the year. In a similar way, as Jesus prepared to leave His disciples and return to heaven, He promised them that the Holy Spirit directly would be present with them even though He, Jesus, would no longer be with them in physical form.

Consider This: Remember that the Word of God also is referred to as a light. With this in mind, how important is it to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us through God's Word? How does this keep us connected to Jesus even though He is no longer with us on earth? Lamps (the Bible) cannot burn without fuel (the oil of the Spirit). How important, then, is it to seek the Spirit's guidance when studying God's Word?

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Dedication of the Levites: Part 2

“For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me” (*Num. 8:16*).

Notice how emphatic the Lord was regarding the special calling of the Levites. They were “wholly given” to Him. The Hebrew reads more literally that they are “given given to me,” emphasizing by repetition just how serious their calling was.

Read Numbers 8:19. What is meant by the phrase that the Levites were to “make an atonement for the children of Israel”? How are we to understand this in light of the Cross? *Rom. 5:11, Heb. 9:25–28.*

Scholars are divided on the precise meaning of the phrase here. Obviously, it does not mean “to make atonement” in the sense of dying for the sins of others. The verb translated “make atonement” in this context has a broader meaning than how it’s commonly used. In this case, the answer could be found in the same verse, in which it says that the Levites, by doing their service on behalf of Israel, would spare them from the plague. That is, in their work of ministry, they were helping protect the children of Israel from the Divine wrath that they would face were they to come “nigh unto the sanctuary” (*Num. 8:19*).

Thus the Levites, like the priests themselves, were doing something on behalf of the people that they couldn’t do themselves. In this looser sense, then, they were said to “make an atonement” for the people.

Though certainly nothing we do can make any kind of atonement, how can we, by faithfully doing our duties, work as the Levites did on behalf of the people? What are you doing in your local church for the betterment of the church and its mission?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED► **STEP 3—Apply**

With so many different forms of worship, how can I individually and we as a church determine how to worship?

Group Activity:

Prop List: (1) Two softball-size (or larger) cookie dough balls. (A) A sugar-cookie dough, the type rolled out for cookie cutting, and (B) another type, for example, peanut-butter dough. (2) A sugar-cookie dough already rolled out between wax paper and various shapes of cutters. (3) Cookie sprinkles, chocolate, butterscotch, and/or peanut butter chips, and icing. (4) Dirt, leaves, eggshells.

Explore the following, using the props to illustrate: If eating dessert can symbolize true worship, then (1) what shape or form should my worship come in? (2) If I change the form from a star to a circle (use whatever shapes apply to your actual cutter shapes), is it still dessert? (3) If I decorate with sprinkles and/or icing, are the cookies still dessert? (4) If I add chips or use a different dough, might we still have dessert? (5) What if I added dirt, leaves, etc. (Be dramatic: add these to the unused dough ball!)? Would it still be dessert?

Now apply the discussion to worship. (1) What constitutes the essence/purpose of worship? (2) Can worship assume different forms and still be true to that purpose? By which standards do we determine whether there are elements of worship practice that invalidate the experience of worship by negating its essence? That is, how do we determine what is dirt (invalid element) and what are sprinkles (acceptable elements)?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Develop a list of daily activities that church members can do to reinforce the experience of Christ's sacrificial death and submit it to your church's newsletter editor for publication. Ideas such as reading about Christ's sacrifice certainly will be on every list, but go beyond the obvious. Find ways to use our routine activities (eating, bathing, commuting to work, resting, and so on) to remind us of Jesus' sacrifice.

Further Study: Trace the ancient Jewish custom of “laying on hands.” What seems to be its essential significance? *Gen. 48:8, 9, 13, 14, 17–20; Num. 27:18–23; Matt. 19:13–15; Acts 13:1–3.*

“To the Jew this form was a significant one. When a Jewish father blessed his children, he laid his hands reverently upon their heads. When an animal was devoted to sacrifice, the hand of the one invested with priestly authority was laid upon the head of the victim. And when the ministers of the church of believers in Antioch laid their hands upon Paul and Barnabas, they, by that action, asked God to bestow His blessing upon the chosen apostles in their devotion to the specific work to which they had been appointed.

“At a later date the rite of ordination by the laying on of hands was greatly abused; unwarrantable importance was attached to the act, as if a power came at once upon those who received such ordination, which immediately qualified them for any and all ministerial work. But in the setting apart of these two apostles, there is no record indicating that any virtue was imparted by the mere act of laying on of hands.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 162.

Discussion Questions:

1 In what way does the local pastor today function in the role of the Levite? What can we do to support the pastor in this role?

2 How does the act of giving impact our relationship with God? How is giving from our income an act of worship, of faith? Why is it so important to give generously?

3 What is our understanding of what Jesus did on the cross for us that we could not do for ourselves? Why did Jesus have to die? Couldn't just reforming our lives and obeying the law and loving others unconditionally be enough to make us right with God?

Summary: The forms of ancient Israel's worship differ from that of the modern church in the world's wilderness, but its substance is the same. Dedication of our material goods, contemplation of the meaning of the Cross, prayer, reflecting the light of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and total dedication to the Lord all spell out the same biblical faith.