

# Lessons From *the* Sanctuary

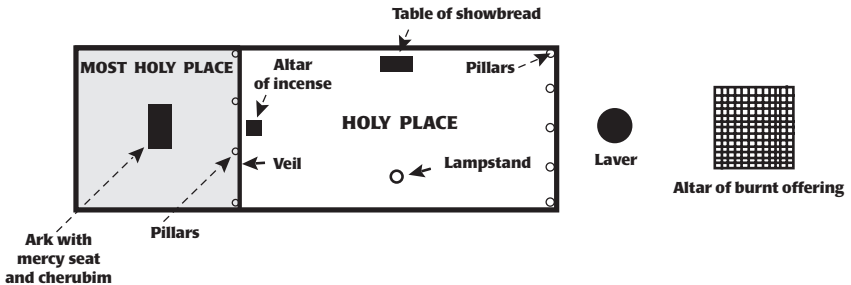


## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Exod. 40:9, 10; Lev. 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:14–16; Exod. 31:2–11; Rom. 3:25–28; 1 Kings 8:31–53; Ps. 73:1–17.*

**Memory Text:** “Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them” (*Exodus 25:8, NASB*).

The sanctuary is one of God’s major devices to teach us the meaning of the gospel. As we study the sanctuary this week, the drawing below will be helpful:



This week’s lesson focuses on some of the major insights provided by the earthly sanctuary. We will study the sacrificial system later.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 26.*

## Place of the Presence

**According** to Exodus 25:8, what was the purpose of the earthly sanctuary in the wilderness? What amazing truth does this teach us about God's love for us?

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In the Garden of Eden, sin had broken the face-to-face relationship between God and humanity. Sin forfeited our first parents' unhindered communion with God. However, the Creator still desired to draw us to Himself and to enjoy a deep covenant relationship with fallen humanity, and He began this process right there in Eden. Centuries later, in saving Israel out of Egypt and establishing the sanctuary and the sacrificial system, God again took the initiative in bringing humanity back into His presence.

The sanctuary thus testifies of God's unceasing desire to dwell among His people. This is God's idea (*Ps. 132:13, 14*). His ultimate goal is relationship, and the sanctuary services were His chosen means to illustrate that relationship. The sanctuary is the tangible evidence of God's presence with His people on earth.

From the description in Numbers 2, it is evident that the tabernacle was located in the center of the square encampment where, as was customary in the ancient Near East, the king would place his tent. So, the tabernacle symbolizes that God is the King over Israel.

The Levites, meanwhile, placed their tents around the tabernacle (*Num. 1:53*), and the other tribes put theirs farther around at a "distance" in groups of three (*Num. 2:2*). This illustrates in a tangible way both the nearness and the distance of God.

Another purpose of the sanctuary was to provide a location for a centralized, divinely ordained system of worship. Because God's presence in the midst of the people was jeopardized by their impurities and moral failings, He provided a system of sacrifices and offerings through which unholy people could live and remain in the presence of a Holy God.

So, in this context, the sanctuary revealed details regarding the plan of redemption, which included not only the sacrifices but the ministry of the priesthood, which was an integral part of the plan of redemption, as well.

**With the sanctuary, the Creator of the universe, the One who made all that was made (see *John 1:1-3*), lowered Himself to dwell among homeless wanderers in the desert. How should this fact alone help us avoid harboring ethnic, class, or cultural prejudices against anyone?**

## “Be Ye Holy”

“And thou shalt take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle, and all that is therein, and shalt hallow it, and all the vessels thereof: and it shall be holy.

“And thou shalt anoint the altar of the burnt offering, and all his vessels, and sanctify the altar: and it shall be an altar most holy” (*Exod. 40:9, 10*).

Exodus 40:9, 10 shows us that the sanctuary was to be regarded as “holy.” The basic idea of holiness is separateness and uniqueness, in combination with one’s belonging to God.

“The typical service was the connecting link between God and Israel. The sacrificial offerings were designed to prefigure the sacrifice of Christ, and thus to preserve in the hearts of the people an unwavering faith in the Redeemer to come. Hence, in order that the Lord might accept their sacrifices, and continue His presence with them, and, on the other hand, that the people might have a correct knowledge of the plan of salvation, and a right understanding of their duty, it was of the utmost importance that holiness of heart and purity of life, reverence for God, and strict obedience to His requirements, should be maintained by all connected with the sanctuary.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1010.

**Read** Leviticus 19:2 and 1 Peter 1:14–16. What is the primary reason for the people to be holy?

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God’s holiness transforms us and sets us apart. His holiness is the ultimate motivation for the ethical conduct of His people in all spheres of life (*see Leviticus 19*), whether that be observing the dietary laws (*Lev. 11:44, 45*), respecting the priest (*Lev. 21:8*), or not conforming to former lusts (*1 Pet. 1:14*). Obviously, God wants us to grow in holiness as we become closer to Him. This change can come about only through a self-surrender of our sinful natures and through a willingness to do what is right, regardless of the consequences.

**Think about yourself, your habits, your tastes, your activities, et cetera. How much of what you are, and what you do, would be considered “holy”? It is kind of a tough question to face, isn’t it?**

## Instruments of the Sanctuary

**Read** Exodus 31:2–11. What do these verses teach us about the making of the objects in the earthly sanctuary? What link is there with Genesis 1:2? See also *Exod. 25:9*.

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Of all the objects in the sanctuary, the ark of the testimony was the supreme symbol of God's presence and holiness. The name derives from the two stone tablets of the law, called the "testimony" (*Exod. 32:15, 16*), that were placed inside the ark (*Exod. 25:16, 21*).

On top of the ark was placed the "mercy seat," with two cherubim overshadowing the cover with their wings (*Exod. 25:17–21*). It is appropriately called the "atonement cover" (*NIV*), for it conveys the idea that our compassionate and gracious God has reconciled the people with Himself and made every provision for them to maintain a covenant relationship with Him.

This is the place where, once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur in the Hebrew), atonement for the people and the sanctuary took place (*Lev. 16:14–16*). In Romans 3:25, Paul refers to Jesus as "atonement cover" (usually translated as "propitiation" or "sacrifice of atonement"), for Jesus Himself is the place of Redemption, the One through whom God has made atonement for our sins.

In the Holy Place, the first compartment, the lampstand continually provided light (*Lev. 24:1–4*), and the altar of incense produced the protective smoke that concealed the presence of God from the priest (*Lev. 16:12, 13*). On the table for the bread of the presence were placed twelve loaves of bread, representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Dishes, pans, jars, and bowls (*Exod. 25:29, 30*) also were placed on the table. Although little information is given about the significance of these items, it seems that they represented the elements of a covenant meal (*recalling Exod. 24:11*) and served as a constant reminder of God's covenant with the people.

**Read Romans 3:25–28. What great hope can we take from the promise of salvation "by faith apart from the deeds of the law"? (*NKJV*).**

## Center of Divine and Communal Activity

**Read** 1 Kings 8:31–53. What more does this text teach us about the function of the sanctuary?

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At the dedication ceremony of the newly built temple, King Solomon offered seven kinds of specific prayers that could be offered at the temple. The seven functions exemplify the extensive role of the temple in the lives of the Israelites. The temple was a place for seeking forgiveness (*vss. 30*); for oath swearing (*vss. 31, 32*); for supplication when defeated (*vss. 33, 34*); for petition when faced with drought (*vss. 35, 36*) or other disasters (*vss. 37–40*). It was also a place for the foreigner to pray (*vss. 41–43*), as well as a place to petition for victory (*vss. 44, 45*).

That the temple was intended to be a “‘house of prayer for all the peoples’ ” (*Isa. 56:7, NASB*) becomes evident from the fact that Solomon envisioned the individual Israelite, the foreigner, and the entire population as petitioners.

**The** sanctuary was the ideological center of basically all activity in Israel. Religion was not just part of the believer’s life, even if it was a major part; it was life. What does this tell us about the role that our faith should play in our own lives?

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When the people wanted to receive advice or judgment, or if they repented of their sins, they went to the sanctuary. The sanctuary was also the hub of life during the desert years of Israel. When God desired to communicate to His people, He did so from the sanctuary (*Exod. 25:22*). Therefore, it is appropriately called the “tent of meeting” (*for example, Lev. 1:1, NASB*).

**Think about your prayer life. How deep, how rich, how faith-affirming and life changing is it? Perhaps the first question you need to ask yourself is: how much time do I spend in prayer?**

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## “Until I Went Into the Sanctuary of God”

Time and again, the Psalms show that the sanctuary plays a significant part in the relationship between believers and God. Well known is the firm conviction David expressed at the end of Psalm 23 that he “will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (*vs. 6, NKJV*). David’s foremost wish in Psalm 27 was to be in the presence of Yahweh, a presence which was best experienced in the sanctuary. In order to show how much he cherished the sanctuary, David used the full range of expressions to refer to it, calling it the house of the Lord, the temple, the tabernacle, and the tent. It is there that one can meditate and “behold the beauty of the LORD” (*Ps. 27:4, NKJV*).

The activities of God in the sanctuary illustrate some crucial points: He keeps the worshiper safe and hides him in His sanctuary, even in tough times (*Ps. 27:5*). God provides secure refuge and assures peace of mind for all who come into His presence. These expressions connect the beauty of God to what He does for His people. In addition, the sanctuary service with its symbolic significance shows the goodness and justice of God.

The ultimate object of David’s deepest desire was not only simply to be in the sanctuary but for Yahweh to be present with him. That is why David resolves to “seek” God (*Ps. 27:4, 8*).

**Read** Psalm 73:1–17. Which insights did Asaph receive after entering the sanctuary?

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In Psalm 73, Asaph addressed the problem of suffering. He could not understand the apparent success of the wicked (*vss. 4–12*) while the faithful were afflicted. He himself almost slipped (*vss. 1–3*), but going into the sanctuary made the difference for him (*vss. 13–17*). There, Asaph could see the same power and glory of God that David mentions in Psalm 63:2 and recognize that the present conditions will one day change and justice will be done. He could reflect anew on the truth and receive reaffirmation that, in the end, the wicked are on slippery ground (*Ps. 73:18–20*) and the faithful are secure (*vss. 21–28*). For those who seek God, the sanctuary becomes a place of confidence and a stronghold of life, one where God will set them “high upon a rock” (*Ps. 27:5, NKJV*). From the truth that the sanctuary service teaches, we can indeed learn to trust in the goodness and the justice of God.

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 343–358, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“For the building of the sanctuary great and expensive preparations were necessary; a large amount of the most precious and costly material was required; yet the Lord accepted only freewill offerings. ‘Of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take My offering’ was the divine command repeated by Moses to the congregation. Devotion to God and a spirit of sacrifice were the first requisites in preparing a dwelling place for the Most High.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 343.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the question of God’s justice. We see so little justice in this world now. Why, then, without the ultimate hope of God’s justice, would there be no hope of justice at all?
- 2 Someone wrote: “The tabernacle is a piece of holy ground amid a world that has lost its way.” What does that mean to you?
- 3 Read 1 Peter 1:14–16. In what way do you understand God’s holiness? What does it mean to be holy yourself? How can we become holy?
- 4 The sons of Eli are an example of people who were “close” to God but who lost their appreciation of His holiness (*1 Sam. 2:12–17*). How can you avoid losing a sense of God’s holiness? Why are prayer, study, and obedience crucial in helping us to preserve the awareness of His holiness?
- 5 “The most important part of the daily ministration was the service performed in behalf of individuals. The repentant sinner brought his offering to the door of the tabernacle, and placing his hand upon the victim’s head, confessed his sins, thus in figure transferring them from himself to the innocent sacrifice. By his own hand the animal was then slain, and the blood was carried by the priest into the holy place and sprinkled before the veil, behind which was the ark containing the law that the sinner had transgressed. By this ceremony the sin was, through the blood, transferred in figure to the sanctuary.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 354. How does this quote help us to understand the ways in which “salvation by faith” was revealed in the sanctuary service?

## Persecuted and Victorious

“Hang the heretics!” the angry mob shouted, shoving my neighbor and me toward a makeshift gallows. Rough hands slipped a noose over my head and shouted, “Now will you repent?”

“No!” I said, and the noose drew tighter around my neck.

Months earlier I noticed a man reading a Bible on a bus. He saw my interest and urged me to buy a Bible and discover God’s truths for myself. Then he invited me to visit the Seventh-day Adventist church. I bought a Bible and began reading, eager to share what I was learning with others.

On Sabbath my wife and I walked two hours to the next village to visit the Seventh-day Adventist church. Church members gave me eight Bibles to share, and a layman offered to come to the village and study with us.

I gave out the Bibles and invited my neighbors to study with me. Soon my house was full of people who wanted to know God’s Word! But when the local village leaders learned of the Bible study, they accused us of making trouble and threatened us. The next day an angry mob came to arrest my neighbor and me.

We were told to renounce our faith. We refused, and the men placed the ropes around our necks. As I prayed for my family and the new believers, someone cut the ropes. They let my friend go, but they beat me and threatened me. Still I refused to deny Christ.

Eventually they let me go, but as I hurried toward home I noticed some villagers following me with machetes. I ducked behind some tall bushes and ran home, where the Seventh-day Adventist layman waited with my wife.

“Come and stay in our town for a while,” he urged. We gathered some clothes and our animals, and we escaped to the neighboring village, where we stayed until the church could work out a solution with our village leaders. At night we sneaked back home to harvest our crops so we would have food. Soon my wife and I were baptized.



When it was safe, we returned home, free to worship and share our faith with friends and family. The village leaders gave us land, and we built a church. Today more than three hundred Seventh-day Adventists, and many visitors worship with us!

We praise God for turning persecution into praise. Part of a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering helped to build churches in my region of central Mexico. Thank you!

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