

The Efficacy of His Priestly Ministry



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 25:8; Matt. 27:50, 51; Acts 7:54–56; Heb. 6:19, 20; 7:23–28; 8:1, 2; 9.*

Memory Text: “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (*Hebrews 8:1, NKJV*).

Not long after the Creation . . . our first parents fell into sin. . . . In the wake of this terrible crisis, God's first concern was for human restoration and the eternal security of the universe. The death of a member of the Godhead—a contingency already determined in the foreknowledge and council of God (*see Rev. 13:8*)—was the only means to that end.

“To secure human participation and cooperation in this supreme endeavor, God moved quickly to inform our first parents of the plan. At the same time, He put in place a teaching device to keep it perpetually before their attention and that of succeeding generations.”—Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1993), pp. 17, 18. That teaching device, of course, was the sanctuary service.

The sanctuary became the center of Hebrew worship, and through its activities and ceremonies it pointed suppliants to the cosmic realities of human salvation in a coming Messiah (*see Hebrews 9*) and to the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary. This week we will look at that heavenly sanctuary and Christ's ministry there.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 21.*

Pointers From the Ancient Tabernacle

(Exod. 25:9, 40)

Moses was told to build the tabernacle according to the pattern God had shown him on Mount Sinai (Exod. 25:9, 40). And while common sense would lead us away from the conclusion that every board and nail of the tabernacle (and later the temple) had theological significance, we should, nevertheless, take with all seriousness the teaching function of the Old Testament sanctuary system. Even so, we are not given a great deal of information on the meaning of the symbolism; in fact, in most cases, none at all. Yet, piecing together the little we find in the Old Testament with what we have in the New Testament, we are able to arrive at a fairly good understanding of the overall meaning of certain fundamental aspects of the ancient-sanctuary system and service that point beyond themselves to a greater reality. Consider the following:

1. **The morning and evening sacrifice** (Exod. 29:38–42, Num. 28:1–6)
2. **The shewbread and candlesticks** (Exod. 25:23, 30, 31, 37)
3. **The Day of Atonement ceremonies** (Leviticus 16, Heb. 9:1–12)
4. **The high-priestly garments** (Exod. 28:6–21)

The morning and evening sacrifices symbolized “the daily consecration of the nation to Jehovah, and their constant dependence upon the atoning blood of Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 352. Many allusions to bread in the New Testament seem to suggest that the bread in the tabernacle/sanctuary pointed forward to Christ (see, for example, Matt. 26:26, John 6:48–51). “Both the manna and the shewbread pointed to Christ, the living Bread, who is ever in the presence of God for us.”—Page 354. Similarly, the candlesticks seem to point to Him who said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). “Those semiprecious gems of the [high priest’s] breastplate . . . bore the names of the tribes of Israel, suggesting, says Ellen G. White . . . that as Christ our Great High Priest pleads His blood before the Father, He bears upon His heart the name of every repentant, believing soul.”—Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary*, p. 38. Compare it to *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 351.

Review, to the best of your understanding, the earthly sanctuary service. How does it help you understand the plan of salvation?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Hebrews 8:1*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Realize that the earthly sanctuary represented God’s plan of salvation and pointed to the heavenly sanctuary and the ministry of Jesus in heaven.

Feel: Experience a sense of peace from believing that Jesus is interceding in the heavenly sanctuary for him or her.

Do: Determine to come with boldness to God’s throne of grace to obtain forgiveness.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Plan of Salvation

A The earthly sanctuary was established to represent God’s plan of salvation.

B Each aspect of the earthly sanctuary had a special meaning and pointed to the ministry of Jesus.

C The death of Jesus ended the necessity of the earthly sanctuary ceremonies and rituals. This was signified by the rending of the inner veil, which divided the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.

II. Heavenly High Priest

A After His resurrection, Jesus became our heavenly High Priest.

B Jesus and His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary replaced the earthly tabernacle, the earthly priesthood, the animal sacrifices, and the daily and yearly ceremonies.

C Because of the one sacrifice of Christ—one time, for all people—we now can come “boldly” to the throne (of grace) where the Most Holy is seated.

▶ **Summary:** Christ’s high-priestly ministry has no time barrier. It was relevant in the days of the early New Testament church and still applies to our time today. Through His ministry, all who come to Jesus can have access to God the Father.

All Pointers Led to Him

Read John 1:29. What is the significance of John calling Jesus the “Lamb of God”?

The wilderness tabernacle stood at the center of Israelite worship for hundreds of years. And as long as Israel remained faithful to God, they looked upon this sacred edifice as the place of salvation, the place of atonement between God and His people. The supernatural manifestations that accompanied the dedication of the structure (*see Exod. 40:34, 35*) had riveted such impressions deep into the psyche of those who witnessed them.

The signal demonstration of God’s attendance at the temple’s dedication gave no hint, however, of the structure’s turbulent future. Completely destroyed by the Babylonian army, it later was rebuilt, though not up to the standard of its previous splendor. This, however, was the temple Jesus knew, the one that felt His footsteps. And as Jesus died upon a cross outside Jerusalem one Friday afternoon two thousand years ago, it was in the inner sanctum of this very temple that the curtain mysteriously ripped in two, from top to bottom (*Matt. 27:51*).

“It was the hour of the evening sacrifice. The lamb representing Christ had been brought to be slain.” But the earth shakes, and “with a rending noise the inner veil of the temple is torn from top to bottom by an unseen hand, throwing open to the gaze of the multitude a place once filled with the presence of God.” In one fell swoop, this place where “the Shekinah had dwelt,” and where “God had manifested His glory above the mercy seat,” is now open to public view! “The most holy place of the earthly sanctuary is no longer sacred.” Then in dramatic fashion, she brings the message home: “All is terror and confusion. The priest is about to slay the victim; but the knife drops from his nerveless hand, and the lamb escapes. Type has met antitype in the death of God’s Son. The great sacrifice has been made. . . . It was as if a living voice had spoken to the worshipers: There is now an end to all sacrifices and offerings for sin. The Son of God is come according to His word.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 756, 757.

Many Christians today are looking toward the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem as a sign of the end. Even if such a temple were rebuilt and sacrifices were resumed, why would those sacrifices have no efficacy in dealing with the sin problem?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

There's a story about a preacher who told his congregation in Africa that he could walk on water, just as Jesus did, if only he had enough faith. To prove his point, he took them all to a lake. He was on a boat and stepped out into the water. He sank and, much to everyone's horror, drowned. —*The Daily Record*, Aug. 30, 2006.

Ask the class: What is it about human nature that urges us to attempt to be God? What is the difference between being God and being Christlike? Why is it so important to know the distinction between the two? Why is it so much easier for us to try to be God as opposed to being like Christ? How does this human trait get in the way of letting God be God in our lives?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary


(Read Hebrews 1:1–3, Revelation 1:13, Psalm 110.)

I. Helpless and Hopeless

Every time David tried to control his life without the help of God, he failed. And every time he failed, he fell to his knees in recognition of his unworthiness and God's power and grace.

Beloved of God, King David represents each of us. Because we can't escape our sinful nature, we have a need for a priestly mediator.

Consider This: Randomly read passages from Psalms. Meditate on the bipolar behavior of the sinful heart, the vacillation of emotions and needs. How do you experience this same thing in your own life; that is, the desire of your heart for sinful things, carnal things, at one moment and then at another the desire for holiness, purity, faithfulness, and piety?

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Our High Priest *(Heb. 7:25)*

The apostle had been saying a host of things in the first chapters of Hebrews about angels and their status, about Moses and his wilderness experience, about Joshua and the land of Canaan, about the prophets and Abraham and Melchizedek. But as he reaches chapter 8, verse 1, he abruptly calls us back to focus:

Read Hebrews 8:1, 2. What is the main point of all that the apostle was saying up to these verses?

Within the physical layout of the ancient Israelite camp, the ordinary Israelite worshiper stood several barriers removed from the sanctuary's innermost sanctum. To gain physical access, it would have been necessary to get by the buffer of priests and Levites and no-go areas surrounding the sacred enclosure. But now, says the author of Hebrews, Christ, our heavenly Priest-Mediator, has opened a door of unlimited access to the heavenly sanctuary itself, the throne room of the living God. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence," says the sacred writer, "so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (*Heb. 4:16, NIV*). Jesus is our Intercessor in heaven.

Though we do not know the exact form of Jesus' intercession for us, Scripture offers examples of the idea, albeit from a human standpoint. Two of these occurred in the life of Moses, in connection with the rebellion at Kadesh (*Num. 14:10–20*), and in connection with the golden calf affair (*Exod. 32:9–14, 30–32*). These are powerful passages. "But now," Moses pled with God in that last reference, "please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written" (*vs. 32, NIV*). We also witness such forms of priestly intercession in Daniel (*Daniel 9*) and in Jesus' great prayer before His passion (*John 17*).

Examine the following key passages from Hebrews as examples of what our heavenly High Priest does for us: Heb. 2:18, 7:25, 8:3–10, 9:11–14, 10:11–17. Most important, ask yourself, How can I personally benefit in my walk with the Lord by knowing that Jesus is doing these things for me? How can I apply these promises in my life?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED**II. Revelation and Reconciliation**

Christians—born in sin, living in the constant awareness of this sinful world—have two basic, spiritual needs: to know God and to be with God. Constrained by this sinful world, we learn quickly that life is more manageable when we know who God is and what His purpose is for us. Unaware of our inadequacies, we yearn for ways to be with God.

So God, in His love and mercy, gave us His Son—Someone who understands both parties 100 percent; Someone who can mediate and straighten out the problems and misunderstandings that exist between God and us.


Consider This: Before Christ became our Mediator in heaven, He lived here among us, as a human, subject to temptations, subject to many of the things that we struggle with. Why was this such an important part of the plan of salvation? Explain.

III. Jesus, Customized Savior

The role Jesus plays on our earthly journey is so multifaceted. Writers of the Scriptures, inspired by divinity, have used metaphors to describe the function of Jesus to enable us to appreciate and apply Jesus' presence in our daily living. Jesus is described as the Shepherd, the Door, the Light, the Vine, the Cornerstone, etc.

The Bible uses more than one hundred names or titles to describe Jesus. The meaning His life holds for us is beyond our fathoming; His role as Priest and Mediator will be appreciated in its fullness only when we see and understand God's divine government in heaven.

Consider This: Have the class think of other metaphors that symbolize the intimate, concerning, priestly role that Jesus plays in our lives. (The metaphors don't necessarily have to be biblical; they may have modern implications.) Ask how the many titles and functions of Christ help them keep the faith.

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The Difference It Makes: Part 1

Read Hebrews 4:16. What promise is there for us? What are we admonished to do? What hopes does this offer us? How can you apply what is here to your own life?

Do those who know Jesus as Savior and High Priest have a spiritual advantage over others who know Him only as Savior? We will deal with the question in two lessons, but perhaps we can begin by noting the contribution of Hebrews 9 to the issue, in general.

There are, of course, several ways to read the chapter. One is to take a strictly exegetical and linguistic approach to it, defining the meaning of words and phrases, and squeezing out the significance of the verses from a purely academic point of view. But another way, equally valid, essentially bypasses all that. Without ignoring the results of the first approach, it simply reads the chapter and observes what it says. When we do that, here is what we find, as it relates to the basic question before us:

1. What happened under the first covenant (the Old Testament sanctuary services) was provisional only. Fundamentally inadequate to bring about internal change, the offerings and ceremonies pointed beyond themselves to something bigger.

2. That bigger something now has happened. Christ has come. He is the real High Priest (*Heb. 9:11*). His entrance into the heavenly sanctuary was not through “the blood of goats and calves; but . . . once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption” (*vs. 12, NIV*).

3. The offerings under the old system achieved external results (*vs. 13*) but could not effect internal change. But the blood of Christ reaches to our inner being, cleansing “our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (*vs. 14, NIV*).

4. Christ shed His blood once, on our behalf; and now He appears for us in the presence of God as our High Priest (*vss. 24–28*).

Read over Hebrews 9. What is the essential message it is giving us? What promises are found in there that you especially find encouraging for yourself?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

■ *How can certain metaphors be more helpful to some people than others? That is, why do some folk relate better to certain images than to others?*

■ *What does the fact that God uses different images at different times to reach us tell us about how the Lord can meet the needs of all of us, regardless of our personalities or histories?*

► **STEP 3—Practice****Thought Questions:**

1 To be someone’s advocate is relatively risk free; but to be someone’s savior is a commitment beyond death! How does Jesus’ death as Savior make Him the most competent Priest and Mediator you could have? How does Jesus’ title of Priest affect your relationship with Him?

2 Dwell on the question of the whole purpose of a mediator. Why do we need Jesus as a Mediator? What’s the reason for it?

3 What biblical examples can you find of people working the role of a mediator on behalf of others? For example, look at the role of Moses (*see Deut. 9:8–19*).

Application Questions:

How can volunteering in a social service activity (such as tutoring a child) help convey the attitude of Christ as a Mediator to someone? What other kinds of interactions could help us be mediators like Jesus?

Witnessing

Help your class connect their community projects with Christlike attitudes and behaviors. Help them see how they can be “mediators” for the church.

Consider This: Jesus came to show us how we can access divine power for meaningful life on earth. Our interactions with people give us opportunities to be a Christlike mediator. Encourage your class to match their

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The Difference It Makes: Part 2

The knowledge and acceptance of Jesus as our High Priest should make us kind and generous and patient, the same traits He has manifested toward us. It should make us merciful and gracious, in the same way He has shown mercy and grace toward us. And it should make us morally upright and everlastingly grateful for the profound sacrifice made on our behalf. But any Adventist who has interacted with Christians of other persuasions would readily admit that they have found them equally gracious and merciful and patient and generous and kind and morally upright. So, then, what real difference does “our message of the sanctuary” make?

It probably has something to do with loyalty and faithfulness. When the author of Hebrews wanted to reestablish the recipients of his book in the faith, he turned to the sanctuary theme.

Read Hebrews 10:19–25. What is the practical message given to us here, a message that should influence how we live our lives and how we relate to others?

The book of Hebrews invites us to approach “the throne of grace” (*Heb. 4:16*). The implications here are multifaceted, but one of them gets to the question before us just now. The way has been made for us, through Jesus, to approach God in the heavenly sanctuary. And to follow Jesus by faith into the sanctuary is not only to have one’s soul cleansed by His marvelous grace but also to experience a new appreciation for His immutable law (*see Heb. 8:10*). This transaction, utterly significant in the context of what Adventists call “the great controversy between good and evil,” defines the difference the sanctuary teaching makes for us. By faith we enter with full assurance into that sacred place where Jesus ministers. And there, against all possible odds, we cling to the One whose indelible promise is symbolized by the ark of the covenant, the throne of the living God Himself, founded on justice and mercy. Thus anchored, we do not drift—not into a view of the law that leads to the abandonment of God’s holy Sabbath and not into evolutionary conceptions of origins that seek to dethrone the living God from His own universe. The doctrine of the sanctuary thus becomes a protection for us against rebellion and secures for God a faithful remnant in a revolted world.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

spiritual gifts with opportunities of mediation (e.g., the spiritual gift of listening enables one to be a problem solver).

► **STEP 4—Apply**

“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time” (*1 Tim. 2:5, 6, NASB*).

During the second century Irenaeus of Lyons taught that Jesus was offered as a ransom to the devil to free people’s souls. The devil, however, was defeated because he did not know that Jesus was God Himself!

For hundreds of years this theory was adopted by the Christian world, until Anselm of Canterbury pointed out that Irenaeus’s theory assumed that the devil had far too much power. Instead, Anselm said that Jesus’ life was paid to God and not to the devil!

What a more poignant picture that makes—Jesus’ life given as a ransom to God in exchange for my eternal life!

Application Questions:

- 1 A ransom is required to free hostages. Sometimes a hostage exchange is demanded to guarantee the transaction. How is Jesus’ death more than a “hostage exchange”?
- 2 What are the benefits of having a Savior who is superior to anything or anyone else? How can His superiority motivate you in your life? What is your potential if you maximize the use of His superiority?
- 3 Compile verses about the power of Jesus as Savior and Priest as a gift to a neighbor or friend. Or e-mail your friends a verse a week about the power of Jesus. Ask your friends or neighbors how this has impacted them. How has this witnessing experience been a blessing to you? Share your story in class on Sabbath.
- 4 How can you actively bring Christ as a Mediator into the workplace and thereby be a witness of your Christian lifestyle? What role can prayer play in this endeavor?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “In the Holy of Holies,” pp. 423–426, in *The Great Controversy*; “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 350–358, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

“The subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God’s hand had directed the great advent movement, and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 423.

“I . . . see the heavenly sanctuary as the dwelling place of God, the seat of His government, the nerve center of the universe. As such, it has always existed. But with the fall of humanity it assumed an added function, namely, the solution of the cosmic rebellion and the security of the universe. It is in this sense that we picture it when we think of the ancient sacrificial system. We see it through a glass colored by the ministry for the eradication of sin.”—Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary*, p. 71.

“I do not visualize an empty heavenly sanctuary. The throne of God, in whatever form, is there, surrounded by multitudes of angels. Best of all—from our standpoint, at least—our All-sufficient High Priest, Jesus Christ Himself, is there! He fills it full! He stands before the throne of God for us! And that’s enough for me!”—Page 71.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does our understanding of the pre-Advent judgment fit in with our understanding of Christ as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary? Why should the judgment be part-and-parcel of our sanctuary message? Most important, how can we teach the judgment as part of the good news of Jesus as our Substitute in judgment?
- 2 What does the reality of Christ’s high-priestly ministry mean to you personally? What experience(s) can you share about how this teaching has benefited you spiritually?
- 3 Go back over the week’s lesson and make a list of all the benefits we derive from Christ as our High Priest. Bring them to class and discuss the implication of these benefits and how they should impact our lives as individuals and as a church community. How can we better take advantage of these promises in order to further our witness and mission to the world?