

Rejoicing Before *the* Lord: The Sanctuary *and* Worship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 25:1–9; Exodus 35: 29:38, 39; 25:10–22; Deut. 12:5–7, 12, 18; 16:13–16.*

Memory Text: “And ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God, ye, and your sons, and your daughters, and your menservants, and your maidservants, and the Levite that is within your gates; forasmuch as he hath no part nor inheritance with you” (*Deuteronomy 12:12*).

Russian writer, Leo Tolstoy, wrote about a friend who, nearing death, explained his own loss of faith. The man said that from his childhood he had prayed, his own act of private devotion and worship before going to sleep. One day, after a hunting trip with his brother, they were getting ready for bed in the same room, and he knelt down to pray. His brother looked at him and said, “You still doing that?” From that moment on, the man never prayed again, never worshiped again, never exercised any faith. The words, “You still doing that?” revealed just how empty and meaningless this ritual had been to him all these years, and thus he stopped.

This story illustrates the danger of mere ritual. Worship needs to come from the heart, from the soul, from a true relationship with God. That is why this week we will look at the ancient Israelite sanctuary service, the center of Israelite worship, and derive what lessons we can from it about how we can have a deeper worship experience.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 23.*

“That I May Dwell Among Them”

“ ‘You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which You have made for Your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established’ ” (*Exod. 15:17, NKJV*).

This is the first mention in Scripture of a sanctuary. It was sung as part of the song of deliverance by the children of Israel after their escape from Egypt. The verse talks not just about the sanctuary but implies that it will be God’s dwelling on earth. The Hebrew word translated as “dwelling” comes from a root that means, literally, “to sit.” Was the Lord really going to dwell, “to sit,” among His people here on earth?

Read Exodus 25:1–9. What are the two main points that we learn from the verses, and why are they amazing? (As you think about the answer, think about who God is, His power, His might and majesty.)

The God who delivered Israel was now going to dwell among them. The same God who was able to perform so many incredible “signs and wonders” (*Deut. 6:22*), the God who created the heavens and the earth, would now live among His people. Talk about the presence of God being near!

On top of that, He was going to live in a building made by fallen human beings. He, who spoke the world into existence, could have spoken the word and created a magnificent structure. Instead, He had His people intimately and intricately involved in the creation of the place constructed not only for His dwelling but the place that would be the center of all Israelite worship.

The Israelites didn’t make the sanctuary according to human standards but “ ‘according to . . . the pattern, . . . just so you shall make it’ ” (*Exod. 25:9, NKJV*). Every aspect of the earthly tabernacle was to represent a holy God properly and be worthy of His presence.

Everything about it was to inspire a sense of awe and reverence. After all, this was the dwelling place of the Creator of the universe.

Imagine standing outside a building and knowing that inside that very structure dwelled Yahweh, the Creator God, the Lord of the heavens and earth. What kind of attitude would you have, and why? What should your answer tell you about the attitude you should have during worship?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Deuteronomy 12:12*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Illustrate how the sanctuary was not only the center of worship but at the center of relationship and communication with God.

Feel: Nurture attitudes of earnest searching, selfless service, and celebration of God's blessings in our acts of worship.

Do: Present ourselves daily as a living and holy sacrifice in worship.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: God Dwelling With Us

A How did the sanctuary provide a place where one could experience a saving relationship with God?

B How did the sanctuary illustrate doctrines regarding God's holy and glorious character and expectations regarding how He was to be worshiped?

C How did it provide for opportunities to celebrate God's blessings?

D How did the sanctuary provide opportunity for communication and relationship?

II. Feel: The Earnest Seeker After God

A Though the ritual sacrifices were offered daily, what attitudes on the part of the worshipers kept these rituals from sinking into meaningless, heartless tradition?

B What role did the calendar of feasts and Sabbaths play in fostering attitudes of rejoicing and celebration in worship?

III. Do: Living Temple, Living Sacrifice

A How do the sanctuary services of Israel's time inform our daily devotions and spiritual service?

B How do they inform our weekly, communal worship services?

► **Summary:** The sanctuary worship services centered on God's provisions to save us from sin and make us holy on a daily basis. They also provided the means of intimate communication and celebration of God's goodness.

Willing Hearts

As we saw yesterday, not only did the Lord choose to dwell among His people, He did so in a building that they were to make themselves, as opposed to something He created supernaturally. That is, He got them directly involved, an act that ideally would have drawn them closer to Him. Along with that, He didn't miraculously create the material that would be used for the structure.

Read Exodus 35. What is happening here, and what important lessons can we take from this for ourselves in regard to the whole question of worship?

Notice the emphasis on the word *willing*. God said, “whoever is of a willing heart” (*Exod. 35:5, NKJV*), and everyone “whose heart was stirred” (*Exod. 35:21, NKJV*) responded. This means that there was no fire and thunder and loud voice from Sinai commanding them to give these offerings. Instead, here we see the working of the Holy Spirit, who never forces Himself on anyone. Their willingness to give revealed a sense of thanksgiving and gratefulness. After all, look at what the Lord had done for them.

Also, notice that the people were not only willing to give to the work of building a sanctuary, but they did so with a spirit of joy and energy. They willingly gave material gifts, their time, their talents, and the work of their creative abilities: “All the women whose hearts stirred with wisdom . . .” (*vs. 26, NKJV*); “everyone whose heart was stirred, to come and do the work” (*Exod. 36:2, NKJV*).

By giving as they were, what were the Israelites also doing, even before the sanctuary was made?

We often tend to think of worship as a group of people coming together to sing, pray, and listen to a sermon. And while that is true, worship is not limited to that. What the children of Israel were doing here was worshipping. Every act of self-denial in giving up their own material goods or their own time or their own talents for the cause of their Lord was an act of worship.

Think about your own acts of giving—tithes, offerings, time, talent. How have you experienced what it means to worship through these acts? By giving of yourself, how are you enriched in return?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: **Worship is not a spectator sport (or a sport at all, for that matter). Worship demands our engagement, both in the active praising of God and in the giving of ourselves and what we have.**

Just for Teachers: **Emphasize the value that God places upon our relationship with Him as seen in our experience of worship and giving.**

A long time ago in Rome there was a merchant. Every year of his adult life he had paid the prescribed tax of one denarius to the emperor. His business prospered, but what he had was never enough. So, he quietly resented paying that one denarius. Nevertheless, he continued to pay, knowing there was no alternative. But one day, he said to his friend, “You know, it is really very stupid for me to have to pay the emperor one denarius every year.”

His friend looked at him in surprise. “Why?” he asked.

“Think about it,” replied the merchant. “Who mints the denarii?”

“Why, the emperor, I guess,” said his friend, clearly uncomfortable with this possibly seditious line of thought.

“Exactly!” exclaimed the merchant. “So why does he need my denarius, when he could mint his own and keep them?”

His friend grinned, as if he had been struck with a new idea. “You know, for such a successful man you really aren’t very bright. The whole point is that he doesn’t want *his* denarius—he wants *yours!*”

While the comparison of God with an earthly authority like an emperor is not entirely adequate, people have wondered since the beginning of time why God wants our worship, obedience, and service when He is completely self-sufficient. Why, for example, did God need the kings and people of Israel to build Him a sanctuary? Why did He allow His worship to be conducted in a series of crude tents (the literal meaning of tabernacle, by the way) until He found someone who He felt was worthy of undertaking the project of building a permanent structure? For that matter, why does He need or want us at all?

On a human level it is hard to imagine the implications, much less the answer, to these questions. But we serve a God who grants us the privilege of helping Him to finish His work on earth, even to the extent of living among us and ultimately becoming one of us. As we contemplate this thought, let us never come to take Him for granted or think of our worship as meaningless ritual.

Consider This: Are worship, giving, and service to God the privileges they

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The Continual Burnt Offering

“Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs of the first year, day by day continually. One lamb . . . in the morning, and the other lamb . . . at twilight” (*Exod. 29:38, 39, NKJV*).

The daily offering of lambs, the “continual burnt offering” (*vs. 42*), was to teach the people their constant need of God and their dependence on Him for forgiveness and acceptance. The fire on the altar was to be kept burning day and night (*Lev. 6:8–13*). This fire could serve as a perpetual reminder of their need of a Savior.

God never intended the daily offering of a lamb to be simply a ritual or routine act. It was to be a time of “intense interest to the worshipers,” a time of preparation for worship, in silent prayer and “with earnest heart searching and confession of sin.” Their faith was to grasp the promises of a Savior to come, the true Lamb of God who would spill His blood for the sins of the whole world (see Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 353).

How do the following texts link the death of Christ to animal sacrifices in the Old Testament system? *Heb. 10:1–4; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19.*

In Hebrews 10:5–10, Paul quotes Psalm 40:6–8, showing that Christ fulfilled the true meaning of the sacrificial offerings. He suggests that God received no pleasure from these sacrifices but that they were intended to be a time of sorrow for sin, of repentance, and of turning away from sin. Likewise, the giving of His Son as the ultimate sacrifice would be a time of terrible agony and heartrending sorrow for both the Father and the Son. Paul also emphasized that true worship must always flow from a forgiven, cleansed, and sanctified heart that delights in obeying the One who has made it all possible. “Therefore, I urge you brethren, . . . to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (*Rom. 12:1, NASB*).

Worship means, first and foremost, giving ourselves wholly and completely to God as a living sacrifice. When we give ourselves first, our gifts, our praise, and our hearts will follow. This attitude is a sure protection against meaningless and empty rituals.

Ask yourself these questions: Have I given everything over to Christ, who died for my sins? Or is there some corner of my heart or life of which I refuse to let go? If so, what is it, and how can I be willing to give it up?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

are meant to be for you, or do you feel they are mere routine, or even burdensome? If the latter, what is needed for you to change your attitude?

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the role of giving and personal sacrifice in our worship of God, as exemplified in the activities regarding the holy sanctuary as described in the biblical texts we will study.

Bible Commentary

I. Tabernacle or Tavern . . . ? (Review Exodus 35 with your class.)

The English word *tabernacle* has a fine, religious, churchy sound to it. The word, a translation of the Hebrew *mishkan*, or “dwelling place,” is derived in English from the Latin *tabernaculum*, which literally refers to a tent. If you look more closely, it becomes clear that it shares a common origin with the word *taberna*, which can mean a hut, booth, or tavern. All very humble structures and, in the case of taverns, even slightly disreputable. But in reality, the only major distinction is the use to which the words have been put. If the history of language had been slightly different, we might be referring to the *tavern* of God, and looking down on people who frequent tabernacles.

The tabernacle constructed by the Hebrews in the desert was, in fact, a tent. It was the nicest tent that could be built under the circumstances, but it was a tent nonetheless. The materials were selected with quite specific criteria, but the tent itself was probably similar in basic substance and design to the tents the Hebrews themselves lived in. It was the presence of God that made it holy, and the fact that it had been built in obedience to His instructions; otherwise it would have been just another place.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul tells us that the body of the person who has chosen to dedicate himself or herself to God is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, literally a tabernacle or dwelling place. We mention this quite often in reference to health practices, and that is an important part of it. But the main difference between a Christian and a nonbeliever is that the Christian has allowed God to dwell within, and he or she has chosen to use all his or her strength, energy, and talents to serve Him, however humble they may be. So the question is, are you a tabernacle, or just a tent?

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Communion With God

One of the key aspects of being a Christian, of having a saving relationship with Christ, is that of knowing the Lord. Jesus Himself said, “ ‘And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent’ ” (*John 17:3*). As in any kind of relationship, communication is the key.

Read Exodus 25:10–22. What are the people being told to make, and what promises are they given?

Above the sacred ark that contained God’s holy law, and enshrined on the mercy seat, dwelt the very presence of God in the Shekinah glory. There, “mercy and truth [were] met together; righteousness and peace . . . kissed each other” (*Ps. 85:10*). There, from the altar of incense in the Holy Place, the smoke ascended, representing the prayers of God’s people mingled with the merits and intercession of Christ.

Amid all this is the promise: “And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel” (*Exod. 25:22*).

God promised the people not just His presence; He promised to communicate with His people, to talk to them, to guide them in the ways in which they should go.

What do these texts promise us? *Pss. 37:23, 48:14, Prov. 3:6, John 16:13.*

Today, of course, we do not have an earthly sanctuary, but we do have the promises of God’s guidance and presence in our lives if we surrender to Him. What believer has not seen the leading of the Lord at some point in his or her life?

Here, too, is where worship comes in. We must worship the Lord in an attitude of submission, of surrender, of willingness to be led. A heart yielded to the Lord in prayer, submission, reverence, and surrender, a heart sensing its own need of salvation, of grace, of repentance, is a heart that—full of worshipful praise to God—will be guided in the way that the Lord would desire. In the end, true worship should help you be more open to God’s leading because it should help you learn an attitude of faith and submission. There is nothing empty in this kind of worship.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: What does worship mean to you? How are you building your life in accordance with His perfect will for you?

II. Living Sacrifice *(Review Hebrews 10:1–4 and Romans 12:1 with your class.)*

In the Old Testament, worship meant sacrifice, and sacrifice meant something had to die. All had sinned, and sin meant death, if not to oneself, then to an innocent animal. Few probably understood how this transaction worked in all its metaphysical details, but it made a certain amount of sense on an intuitive level. There was a debt to be paid, and it had to be paid with a life.

The people who came to be called Christians came to understand this in a different, and possibly counterintuitive, way. Jesus Christ, whose life, death, and Resurrection had occurred in the full light of history, and which many of them had personally witnessed, had fulfilled the true meaning of these sacrifices. People who claimed His sacrifice for their sins seemed to change, to actually become happier and better—in a word, selfless. The sacrifice did not need to be repeated as did the temple ceremonies. The old ways seemed to be a shadow of the new and living way. Jesus had died, but He had come back to life! What kind of sacrifice ended with the victim alive and healthy?

As it turned out, the old ways had literally been a shadow of what was to come. God didn't want the lives of animals. The only sacrifice He wanted from us was ourselves, filled with new life: a living sacrifice.

Consider This: True worship still demands sacrifice. Not because God is greedy or wants us to live miserable lives, but because it is the appropriate response to the immeasurable riches we have in Christ. What does it truly mean to give your life to the God who gave His life for you?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: Use the following questions to emphasize the importance of worship as action, as well as a matter of emotion or attitude. Attitudes that are not acted upon are also known as fantasies.

Thought Questions:

❶ Considering that God derived no true benefit from the sacrifices of the temple ritual, why did they seem so important to Him in the books of the Old Testament? How were they more of a promise of what He was going to do in Christ?

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Rejoicing Before the Lord

Substantial parts of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers center on the sanctuary service—its construction, its services, the sacrifices and offerings presented there, and the ministration of the priests. It was a very sacred and holy place. After all, it was not only the place where God Himself dwelt, it was the place where Israel came to be forgiven and cleansed of sin. It was the place where Israel learned and experienced the gospel.

At the same time, we must not come away with the idea that Israelite worship was cold, sterile, and formal. The Lord had set very strict guidelines on what was to be done, but these guidelines were not ends in themselves. Rather, they were means to an end, and the end was that His people would be a holy, joyful, and faithful covenant nation that would teach the world about the true God (*Exod. 19:6, Deut. 4:5–7, Zech. 8:23*).

What do these texts tell us about Israelite worship at the sanctuary?

Lev. 23:39–44; Deut. 12:5–7, 12, 18; 16:13–16.

One of the great struggles facing the church today has to do with worship and worship styles. On one end, church services can be cold, formal, stale, and definitely without joy. The other danger is that emotions become the dominant factor: all that people want to do is have a good time, “rejoicing” in the Lord at the expense of any kind of strict adherence to biblical truths.

An important point to remember, a lesson that we can learn from the sanctuary model, is that all true worship, which should lead to rejoicing, must be so in the context of biblical truth. God gave the Israelites very clear, strict, and formal instructions regarding the construction of the sanctuary and its ministry and services, all of which were meant to teach them the truths of salvation, Redemption, mediation, and judgment. And yet, at the same time, they were to rejoice before the Lord in their worship. This theme appears again and again. It should be clear, then, that one can be very strong in biblical teaching and at the same time have a joyous worship experience. After all, if the truths of salvation, Redemption, mediation, and judgment are not worth rejoicing over, what is?

What is your own experience in rejoicing before the Lord? What does this mean to you? How can you have a more joyful worship experience? How can you make sure that your worship experience is not similar to the friend Tolstoy discussed in this week’s introduction?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

2 God communicated with the Israelites in quite dramatic ways in the Old Testament, especially in the time of Moses. Much of this communication took place in a context of worship. How does God communicate with us today, and how is it facilitated by our worship?

Application Questions:

1 While we don't want worship to be merely a routine, it must become a routine of sorts to be effective in our lives. We need to worship whether or not we happen to feel like it at the moment. Many times, the feelings will follow if we offer our hearts to God. How can we discern that our worship is losing its meaning, and what can we do to bring it back?

2 In Tuesday's lesson Ellen G. White is quoted as saying that the sacrifices that eventually became rote rituals were originally intended to be occasions of intense prayer and soul searching. In some ways, our experience is no different. We start out with high ideals and ambitions, but they seem to decay over time if we aren't mindful. What can we do to keep our worship a vital communication between ourselves and God?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: **Emphasize worship as an acknowledgment of the reality of God. The following activities will emphasize the act of being mindful of His reality and greatness.**

As the lesson notes, the ancient Hebrews were able to look at a distinct building and structure and know that God was represented there; that is, they were looking at a structure and believed that the very presence of God, in a special way, was there. Ask your class to imagine such a concrete presence of God. How would their actions or behaviors change? How would the way they think about things change? After discussing this, emphasize that as Christians, we do live in the presence of God.

If you want to add an extra dimension to this idea, make your students remove their shoes as they walk into the room, as Moses did at the burning bush.

Alternative: Ask the class members to consider areas of their lives in which they might still need to be made over. Suggest that they take note of those areas and make them a topic of focused prayer in the coming days, weeks, or months, and that they look for changes.

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Tabernacle and Its Services,” pp. 343–358; “The Sin of Nadab and Abihu,” pp. 359–362; “The Law and the Covenants,” pp. 367–373, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Lord’s Vineyard,” pp. 288–290, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “Ellen G. White Comments,” in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 1139, 1140.

From the Holy Shekinah, “God made known His will. Divine messages were sometimes communicated to the high priest by a voice from the cloud. Sometimes a light fell upon the angel at the right, to signify approval or acceptance, or a shadow or cloud rested upon the one at the left to reveal disapproval or rejection.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 349.

“In them [His people] the Lord designed to dwell in His fulness in this world; not only in a general way by dwelling in a tent; but by so completely taking possession of their lives, as to show them, and through them the world, how the Messiah would be the dwelling-place of God.”—F. C. Gilbert, *Practical Lessons From the Experience of Israel for the Church of Today* (Concord, Mass.: Good Tidings Press, 1902), p. 351.

Discussion Questions:

- ① How can you help others to see that the giving of tithes and offerings is truly an act of worship? What are we compromising when we do not tithe and do not give offerings?
- ② Look at your own church services. Do they lean more toward the cold, formal, sterile, and joyless? Or do they lean more toward the emotional, toward excitement, and feeling? Or is there a good balance between the extremes? Discuss.
- ③ In an attempt to reach out to the nonchurched, some congregations radically have altered their worship services. While this could be a very good thing, of what dangers should they be aware, such as that of compromise and of the watering down of crucial biblical truths?
- ④ In some worship services, rituals have been performed a certain way for many years, and that is the reason given for not wanting to make any changes. How would you respond to the answer, “This is how we have always done it” when change is suggested and rejected?
- ⑤ The earthly sanctuary was a very sacred and holy place, the place where God Himself dwelt. At the same time, the children of Israel were to rejoice before the Lord there. What lessons can we draw from these important truths about worship?