

Worship

Worship: From Exile to Restoration

Lesson #10 for September 3, 2011

Scriptures: Ezekiel 8; Daniel 3; Jeremiah 29:10-14; Haggai 1; Zechariah 1:1-6; Nehemiah 1.

1. To the ancient Jews, the temple was the center of their worship experience.
2. There were three temples in Jewish history. The first was the tent-tabernacle built in the wilderness at the foot of Mount Sinai (about 1445 B.C.) Very specific instructions were given by God concerning its construction. When it was finished, God descended in majesty and glory and inhabited that tent-tabernacle. For a period of time, the glory of God filled the temple so completely that no one could go inside, not even Moses. (Exodus 40:34,35)
3. The second temple was the magnificent temple that Solomon built on Mount Moriah, the centerpiece of ancient Jerusalem. After David had collected wealth from many sources and contributed a great deal himself, at God's direction he handed this project to his son Solomon who spent years planning and constructing that temple. It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Some have claimed it was the most beautiful structure ever built. When it was completed in about 950 B.C., the glory of the Lord once again entered the temple; and for a time, not even the priests could go inside. (2 Chronicles 7:1-4)
4. God specifically instructed Moses that when the children of Israel entered the promised land, they were supposed to worship Him in only one place. (Deuteronomy 12) Presumably, Moses did not know exactly where that place would be located. After David conquered Jerusalem and made it the capital, he was determined to make it also be the place for God's temple. On Mount Moriah where Abraham had taken Isaac to offer him as a sacrifice to the Lord, Solomon's Temple was built.
5. Solomon's magnificent temple was finally destroyed when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem for the third time and razed the city and temple to the ground in 587/586 B.C.
6. Following the 70 years of Babylonian captivity, Zerubbabel and Joshua led a small group of people, about 50,000, who returned to Jerusalem. Almost immediately, they attempted to set up an altar and begin rebuilding the temple. Their enemies did everything they could to stop them. But finally, between 520 and 516 B.C. with the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, a small temple was rebuilt.
7. In the days of the Maccabees (about 170 B.C.), Antiochus Epiphanies IV tried to turn that temple into a pagan temple honoring Zeus. Approximately 3 ½ years later, the Maccabees restored the temple more or less to its original condition.
8. Around 20 B.C., King Herod the Great—with funding from Caesar Augustus—began a massive rebuilding project that went on for about 50 or 60 years and constructed the final temple in Jerusalem which came to be known as Herod's Temple.
9. Probably in the 3rd century B.C., in other locations people began to build small synagogues for the purpose of education and worship. Ancient documents suggest that in any town with at least 10 Jewish families, they were expected to erect a small synagogue. Other documents suggest that there may have been as many as 480 synagogues in Jerusalem itself. But, no sacrifices were offered in those locations. Sacrifices were only offered at the temple. God had suggested that if more than one place was permitted for sacrifices, people would begin offering sacrifices to "other gods" or in ways not approved by God Himself. That is exactly what Jeroboam did when he became king of the northern tribes when they split off

from the southern kingdom after the reign of Solomon. (1 Kings 13)

10. So, there was only one temple. The temple was the place where sacrifices could be offered. In Jesus' day, as we know, the outer court or Gentile court of Herod's Temple had become a massive market for the exchange of money and for the sale, at exorbitant prices, of animals for sacrifice.
11. So, how did the Jewish people get from that first solemn tent-tabernacle at the foot of Mount Sinai to the final destruction of the temple in A.D. 70?
12. After Solomon's Temple was constructed, the people of Jerusalem particularly and probably all of the Jews believed that temple was the dwelling place of God. They came to believe that God would never allow it to be destroyed. (Jeremiah 7:1-3) But, the wickedness of the people had become so rampant that God had to allow them to go into Babylonian captivity.
13. Ezekiel 8 describes the experience of Ezekiel being transported in vision to observe the wicked things going on in the temple in Jerusalem. What Ezekiel was shown was that several idols had been erected in various places in the temple and a group of about 25 men were actually worshiping the sun in an area where they thought maybe not even God could see them! With this kind of practice going on, how could God preserve the temple and consider it His dwelling place?
14. Did those men worshiping the sun actually believe that God could not see them? (Ezekiel 8:12) This occurred after most of the Jews were already in captivity. Jeremiah confirms this.
15. Compromise does not happen overnight. Solomon's magnificent temple did not become a place for pagan worship immediately. But, step-by-step, bit-by-bit, compromise led to the deterioration of the true worship of God. Think back to the day when Solomon's temple was dedicated. Why did they compromise? How do we avoid it? What can stop it?
16. Could such a process be happening in our church today? Who is upholding the "old standards"? Do the old standards have anything to do with the true worship of God? Are those old standards really more righteous? To what extent should we allow ourselves to be influenced by culture and social expectations around us? Even in matters of worship?
17. If you have been a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for many years, think over the changes that have taken place during your lifetime. Are we standing firmly on God's principles as did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? (Daniel 3) Are we demonstrating an uncompromising faithfulness and allegiance to God? Are we getting closer to God?
18. The exiles who returned from Babylonian captivity had to wait about 20 years before a small temple was finally constructed. It took almost 80 more years before a secure wall surrounded their city. During that 150 year period from the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar until Nehemiah reconstructed the wall, two giants of faith—Daniel and Nehemiah—offered very significant prayers to God. (Daniel 9:5,6; Nehemiah 1:4-6; 9:33; Ezra 9:7,13) While they themselves were apparently good men doing their level best to serve God, their prayers demonstrated that they identified themselves with the sins of their people. They recognized that confession, repentance, and obedience would be needed before things could improve.
19. Are we offering intercessory prayer to God as Daniel and Nehemiah did? Does our church today need intercessory prayers? If not, why are we not in the kingdom of God by this time? What did those men do after they got up from their knees? Those men committed their lives to working for God.
20. Read Revelation 14:6,7. Worship will be an essential part of the final test of God's people here on this earth. There will be two sides—both claiming to be following the true God and to have the truth. Jesus Himself warned us that it will be very difficult to distinguish between

them. (Matthew 24:24; Revelation 13:3,4,7,8) What does the second angel's message say? (Revelation 14:8) Can we be sure that we are separating ourselves from all that is wrong?

21. Historically, we know that the Devil has done everything possible to corrupt the worship of God and confuse human beings and where possible even to get them to worship him. Revelation 13 suggests that he will conduct a massive evangelistic campaign in the final days of this earth's history, and virtually the entire world will follow him—even worship him. (Revelation 13:3-8) How will we protect ourselves from that deception? How can we know for sure that we have chosen the correct side in the great controversy? How can we know for sure that slowly creeping compromise has not affected us as it has so many others? Do we have a clear picture of the truth about God and His character and His government?
22. Even before the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple by Nebuchadnezzar, God had promised—as recorded in Jeremiah 29:10-14—that after 70 years, He would bring His people back to Jerusalem.
23. But, even the small group of some 50,000 who returned to their native land soon gave up their determination to rebuild the temple because of various kinds of opposition. Haggai 1:4 tells us that they were too busy building nice homes for themselves to get the temple rebuilt. But, Haggai and Zechariah got things started again and accomplished that work.
24. Today, we do not depend on a physical temple located in a specific place in the world as a center of our worship experience. Today, we have a communion service instead of offering animal sacrifices. Paul tells us that our bodies are the temple of God. (1 Corinthians 6:19) Are we caring for our bodies as we should care for God's temple?
25. Jesus reminds us that it is not the things that go into the mouth that corrupt a person but rather the things which come out! (Mark 7:15)
26. Part of the message Zechariah was given to inspire the people to rebuild the temple is found in Zechariah 3. In Zechariah 3:1-5, we see a miniature portrayal of the great controversy which takes place over every person. Satan is accusing us, and Jesus is defending us before the heavenly council.
27. Read Haggai 2:9. The temple they finally constructed was so small and insignificant compared with Solomon's temple that the old men who had seen Solomon's temple wept when they saw the new temple. (Ezra 3:12) Remember that when both the original tent-tabernacle at the foot of Mount Sinai and Solomon's Temple were dedicated, God's presence filled them with His glory. There is no evidence that this happened when they rebuilt the temple in Haggai and Zechariah's day. But, Haggai 2:9 tells us that this latter temple would be more splendid than the older ones! How is that possible?
28. The explanation as suggested by Ellen White is that this latter temple was to be filled with the divine/human presence of Jesus Himself!

Solomon, the wisest of Israel's monarchs, had completed the work. This temple was the most magnificent building which the world ever saw. Yet the Lord had declared by the prophet Haggai, concerning the second temple: "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former." "I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts." Haggai 2:9, 7. {GC 23.2}

After the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar it was rebuilt about five hundred years before the birth of Christ by a people who from a lifelong captivity had returned to a wasted and almost deserted country. There were then among them aged men who had seen the glory of Solomon's temple, and who wept at the foundation of the new building, that it must be so inferior to the former. The feeling that prevailed is forcibly described by the prophet:

“Who is [24] left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?” Haggai 2:3; Ezra 3:12. Then was given the promise that the glory of this latter house should be greater than that of the former. {GC 23.3}

But the second temple had not equaled the first in magnificence; nor was it hallowed by those visible tokens of the divine presence which pertained to the first temple. There was no manifestation of supernatural power to mark its dedication. No cloud of glory was seen to fill the newly erected sanctuary. No fire from heaven descended to consume the sacrifice upon its altar. The Shekinah no longer abode between the cherubim in the most holy place; the ark, the mercy seat, and the tables of the testimony were not to be found therein. No voice sounded from heaven to make known to the inquiring priest the will of Jehovah. {GC 24.1} [That sounds like a deserted place, doesn't it?]

For centuries the Jews had vainly endeavored to show wherein the promise of God given by Haggai had been fulfilled; yet pride and unbelief blinded their minds to the true meaning of the prophet's words. The second temple was not honored with the cloud of Jehovah's glory, but with the living presence of One in whom dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily—who was God Himself manifest in the flesh. The “Desire of all nations” had indeed come to His temple when the Man of Nazareth taught and healed in the sacred courts. In the presence of Christ, and in this only, did the second temple exceed the first in glory. {GC 24.2}

29. Think of the implications of this statement. Massive amounts of gold and gems and special materials were used in the construction of the tent-sanctuary and Solomon's Temple. But, God considered the humble presence of the Nazarene as He sat in the courtyard of Herod's Temple and taught the people and performed miracles to heal the sick as a greater evidence of God's glory than any of those things found in the former temples. Instead of gold and gems, Herod's temple saw the blind healed, the lame walk, and the deaf hear! Do our Sabbath school classes and our church services bring glory to God in a similar way? Are we representing God the best we possibly can? Loma Linda University is planning to build two new hospitals to meet the standards and the needs of the people in our future. They will cost millions of dollars. By contrast, suppose Someone were to walk through the halls of any of our hospitals and heal all the patients. Which would be more noteworthy? When those new hospitals are built, the newspaper reports and the government and reporters will all be there to celebrate. What would those same reporters say if Jesus walked through those hallways and healed all the patients? Would they believe it?
30. Read Zechariah 1:1-6. Why is it so difficult for us to learn from other people's mistakes? Can we—as modern Israel—learn from our ancient religious forebears and not make the mistakes they made? Is it presumptuous for us to think after 6000 years of sacred history that a relatively small group of Seventh-day Adventists will actually have the privilege of standing tall and representing God correctly in the final days of this earth's history?
31. Is our worship experience bringing us closer to God each week? Do we understand God better and obey Him more correctly? What can we do to assure ourselves of that kind of experience?

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