

Worship

Rejoicing Before the Lord: The Sanctuary and Worship

Lesson #4 for July 23, 2011

Scriptures: Exodus 25:1-9; Exodus 35; 29:38,39; 25:10-22; Deuteronomy 12:5-7,12; 16:13-16.

1. When you attend your Sabbath school and church services, do they seem like “rejoicing before the Lord”? Do you look forward to attending Sabbath services each week? Or, has your church attendance become somewhat ritualized?
2. Read Exodus 25:1-9. Everything was spelled out in detail. They were to repeat each step—sometimes twice a day, and they were to repeat it again and again. Does that seem like ritual? Some churches seem to be nothing but ritual. What about rosaries, prayer wheels, etc.?
3. Read Revelation 4:8. Would that seem repetitious? Why does so much of what we usually call religion seem to be ritual? Do you think that is what God intends for us? Rejoicing before the Lord does not sound like ritual!
4. Many, many stories could be told about people who have gotten tired of the ritual and have abandoned religion altogether. Look around your church. Do those who are more involved holding positions of responsibility and leadership seem to be more into ritual? Or, more into rejoicing? What does “rejoicing before the Lord” sound like to you? Real, in-depth Bible study is never boring.
5. Most of the second half of the book of Exodus focuses on God’s working with Moses and the people while they constructed the first sanctuary or tabernacle. Obviously, God had been very actively involved with the children of Israel beginning from the time when Moses returned to Egypt and the plagues began. At some point after they began their journey, the pillar of cloud and fire began to guide them. What did they think was happening in that pillar? When their children asked about the pillar, what did they say?
6. Immediately after crossing the Red Sea and rejoicing over their escape from Egyptian bondage, God began to speak to them about the construction of a sanctuary. (Exodus 15:17) God told them that He wanted to dwell among them. The Hebrew word suggests that God wanted to sit down and dwell among them. He was already there in the pillar of cloud and fire, but the sanctuary was to be a new level of involvement. Why would God need more than the pillar? The pillar of cloud and fire was not a very good teaching device. How do you have a conversation with a cloud? Or, a fire?
7. The word *tabernacle* seems to have an almost sacred meaning. It is an Old English word translated from the Hebrew *mishkan* which means simply “a dwelling place.” Our word *tabernacle* is derived from the Latin *tabernaculum* which literally means a tent. It is closely related to the Latin word *taberna* which could mean a hut, a booth, or even a tavern! The similarities between *tavern* and *tabernacle* should be obvious. A tent was necessary as God’s dwelling place during the exodus because it had to be moved all the time. But, they continued to use that tent for hundreds of years after they were safely in the land of Canaan.
8. Would you be comfortable “living” next door to the God who had recently sent all those plagues? Did the children of Israel have any questions about His might, majesty, or power?
9. Since God was so intimately involved in their experience, why didn’t He choose to make the sanctuary for them? He could have done so instantly. It took them almost a year. Why did God choose to dwell in a tent covered with dead animal skins put together by a bunch of amateur humans?

10. Apparently, God was pleased with the final result. God's dazzling Presence came down and entered the tent so that not even Moses could go inside for awhile. (Exodus 40:34,35; Numbers 9:15,16) Was the purpose of that to inspire awe and reverence? Compare that experience with Solomon's Temple. (1 Kings 8:10,11; 2 Chronicles 5:13,14) Yet, despite all of that, Haggai tells us that the humble human presence of Jesus in Herod's Temple made that temple even more glorious. (Haggai 2:9) What does that say about God? What did Jesus do there? He taught and healed the people.
11. Review in your mind what you know about what happened in that sanctuary courtyard and inside the tent. There was a lot of killing of animals and forgiving of sin, a lot of washing and cleansing. There was a continual fire burning and frequent incense offering. There was the weekly preparation of and the consuming of the bread of the presence. What were the Israelites supposed to learn from all of that? Clearly, they were supposed to understand that sin leads to death. They also should have learned that God had a plan for dealing with their sins. Hopefully, they also learned that God cares about cleanliness and order.
12. Considering what they had come from, why didn't God choose to establish a school system or even a synagogue or church where the people could be educated about God instead of that sanctuary system? Wouldn't that have been more appropriate for a group of ignorant slaves just out of bondage? Did the children of Israel feel really close to a God who demanded their animals as sacrifices? Did Moses teach the people?
13. During the wilderness wanderings, the tent-sanctuary was always set up in the middle of the camp. It was supposed to be the center of all of their activities. But, when they were established in the land of Canaan and Solomon's Temple was built in Jerusalem, all the adult males were expected to attend the major religious festivals held there three times a year. That involved an enormous amount of time and effort adding up to about two months each year.
14. Where did the material come from that was used in building the tent-sanctuary? (Exodus 35) The people gave so willingly that they finally had to be told not to bring any more! Does that sound like the experience at your church? Clearly, most of this wealth came from the money and goods that they had received from the Egyptians as they were leaving. Was that a case of "easy come, easy go"?
15. The Scriptures tell us that God is the real owner of everything. So, why does He ask us to give out of our meager possessions? Couldn't He Himself just provide all the resources needed for His work? Instead of asking us to do His work for Him, wouldn't it be more efficient for Him to ask the angels to come and appear as human beings and to do the work? Surely, they would say and do things more efficiently than we do.
16. Twice a day a lamb was offered at the tent-sanctuary. That was known as the continual burnt offering. (Exodus 29:38,39) Those lambs were offered in addition to the individual offerings made for sin. What was that supposed to teach the children of Israel?
17. How much explanation is there in the books of Exodus and Leviticus about the reason for all those services in the sanctuary? Was Moses given detailed instructions about how to teach the people the meaning and purpose of all of that? We get almost all of our understanding of the meaning of the services from the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. Later prophets seemed to understand what it was supposed to be all about. But, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that God was not happy with the way they were worshiping! (Isaiah 1:15-18; Amos 5:21-27) Had God changed His mind? What would God say to us today?
18. When we turn to the New Testament, it says clearly in Romans 12:1,2 that what God really wanted was not dead sacrifices but living ones! Was that idea clear back in the times of Exodus and the rest of the Old Testament?

19. There were several key pieces of furniture located inside the tent—the lampstand, the table of shewbread, and the altar of incense. Of course, the most important of all was the ark or covenant box. Read Exodus 25:10-22. This ark with its two angels standing over it was to represent the very presence of God. Inside the ark were the two stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments. Near the ark was kept a jar of manna and Aaron’s rod that had budded. Above the box was the mercy seat. Why weren’t any of the children of Israel except the high priest allowed to see the ark? It had to be very carefully covered by a special group of priests each time it was to be moved. Then, it had to be carried on the shoulders of a select group of priests. (Numbers 7:9) And no one was allowed to touch it. Remember the experience of Uzzah! (2 Samuel 6:1-11; 1 Chronicles 13:1-14; 15:25-16:6,43) What was the purpose of that very expensive and very precious piece of furniture which was always hidden away? What did the Israelites tell their children about the ark?
20. We have already suggested that one of the main messages of the sacrificial system was to teach them that sin is very serious and leads to death. Our *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* says on page 49: “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.” What do those words mean to you? What was this debt which needed to be paid? To whom was it paid? How was the debt incurred? Who required the payment? Is God the Father demanding His “pound of flesh”? How does God solve the sin problem?
21. Of course, Christians believe that the ultimate sacrifice was the sacrifice of Christ. He suffered and died, but then He rose again! How does that part of the story fit with the ancient sanctuary service? How many sacrificial victims ended up alive and healthy?
22. A number of warnings were given to the children of Israel about the whole religious system. Every commandment except the tenth had a death penalty connected to breaking it! (See <https://www.theox.org/index.cfm/PageID/710/index.html> which is the Teacher’s Guide for Leviticus, question #7) The children of Israel were told that if they got too close to the sacred pieces of furniture in the tabernacle, they would die. (Number 17:13)
23. Read Exodus 25:1-22 (especially verse 22). Were these words intended to be addressed to Moses himself? Or, to all the people? “I will meet you there, and from above the lid between the two winged creatures I will give you all my laws for the people of Israel.” (Exodus 25:22, *GNB*) This clearly implies that the tent of assembly—otherwise known as the sanctuary—was to be a place of meeting between God and the children of Israel. Did the children of Israel understand what was going on inside the tent itself? Did they realize that “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”? (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for July 20) Did the children of Israel feel closer to God as a result of this tent-sanctuary?
24. The children of Israel were clearly protected and guided on a daily basis during their wanderings in the wilderness. On one occasion when they forgot how God was daily protecting them and started really complaining about the food, God removed His protection and they were bitten by vipers that were there. (Deuteronomy 8:14,15; Numbers 21:4-9) Does God ever remove His protection from us? What is God’s wrath? (See Judges 2 & 3)
25. By contrast, what kind of protection and guidance may we experience? (Psalms 37:23; 48:14; Proverbs 3:6; John 16:13) Do these promises from God help to promote your attitude of worship?
26. Some 1400 years later, Jesus came and lived an exemplary life here on this earth and died a cruel death to teach us about the consequences of living according to God’s plan or according to Satan’s plan. When the true final Sacrifice was offered, He died on Passover

Friday. He was dead approximately 36 hours (three days using inclusive dating) and rose on Sunday morning. A few hours later, He ascended to His Father in heaven who confirmed the success of His mission, and then Jesus received the adoration of all heavenly beings. In what ways did the death or deaths of all those thousands and millions of animals in the Old Testament represent that ultimate event? Did any of the Old Testament sacrifices go to heaven a few days later?

27. Of course, if we remember our passage from Romans 12:1,2, it seems clear that He no longer wants animal sacrifices and perhaps never did! (Micah 6:6-8; Isaiah 1:11-14) What He wants is for us to live the kind of lives that represent Him correctly. Our *Bible Study Guide* suggests that the sanctuary/tabernacle was the place where the children of Israel came to be forgiven and cleansed of sin and where they experienced the gospel. What did the children of Israel actually believe was happening there? After the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, they were told that if they came too close to any of the sacred articles inside the sanctuary or the courtyard, they would die. (Numbers 16:40; 17:12)
28. The children of Israel were supposed to be a holy, healthy, and happy people who would spread the good news about our wonderful God to the rest of the then-known world. If they had followed God's directions correctly, they were even told that foreigners would come flocking to Jerusalem to join them in their worship of *Yahweh*. (Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 4:5-7; Zechariah 8:23)
29. Were there any actual public services carried out at the opening to the courtyard? Read Leviticus 23:39-44; Deuteronomy 12:5-7,12,18; 16:13-16. When they had finally settled down in the land of Palestine and Solomon had built that great temple, they were told that no other location could be used for a temple—only the one at Jerusalem. Centuries later, a system of synagogues was established. In the synagogues they could study and worship in each individual village. Why do you think God insisted that they use only the one temple located at Jerusalem? Does the story of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 13 give us a hint?
30. In your travel to different parts of the world and observe Seventh-day Adventist church services today, you will discover there are a great variety of worship styles. Some may seem cold, formal, even ritualistic. Others are very moving and emotional. Does God accept each of those styles? How much variation are we allowed in our worship of God? Does your personal experience of worship seem more like ritual? Or, more like "rejoicing before the Lord"?
31. While ritual does not seem very attractive to us in general, we all must admit that having routines is useful. What would happen if we only went to church or work when we felt like it?
32. For 40 years, the children of Israel experienced the pillar of cloud and fire by day and by night to guide and protect them. (Exodus 13:21,22; 40:36-38) They all could see it. Did that seem more like a representation of God's presence than the tabernacle itself? Were they more inclined to think that God's presence was in the cloud and fire or in the tabernacle?
33. What would you do if God walked into your Sabbath school class on Sabbath morning? What if He came to your church service? How would you respond? What would you say? Would you use only "King James" English? Would you do all of the talking? Would you want Him to do all of the talking? Would you have any questions? Would you dare to ask questions? Would anyone today think it was appropriate to bring a lamb to be sacrificed?

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